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“**T**HE prophet,” writes Dr. Allen, “was always a man of two loyalties: rooted as he was in the tradition of his people and passionately devoted to their welfare, he was yet singled out from his fellows to be Yahweh’s champion among them and against them.”

This book is a study of the conflict between these two loyalties, and of the problem of the relation between Yahweh and his

PROPHET AND NATION

PROPHET AND NATION

(Continued from front flap)

people, as it presented itself to those seers on whom had dawned the vision of absolute righteousness.

The gradual development of this vision, so that it came to imply not only justice and judgment for Israel, but mercy and salvation for mankind, is traced in the latter part of the book, the whole of which has an obvious, though unforced, application to the world of to-day.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THOU MUST VENTURE

THE STRUCTURE OF LIFE

PROPHET AND NATION

A Reconciliation of
Divided Loyalties

by

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LONDON : NISBET & CO., LTD.
22 BERNERS STREET, W.1

First published in 1947

Manufactured in Great Britain

PREFACE

IF any justification is needed for another book on the prophets of Israel, it can surely be found in the fact that recent events have brought us so near to them. For our problem was also theirs : they were set between God and the nation and had to find some way of reconciling the two loyalties. The pages which follow will show how each man faced this challenge in his own way, and how the truth which he won was handed^o on to his successor, so that there is a unity in the experience and teaching of ~~the six~~ who are here dealt with.

Each chapter after the first will show us a prophet torn between his religious and his political loyalties and seeking to unify these : the treatment will be strictly historical and the application to our own time should be all the more forceful because the reader is left to draw it for himself. Literary and historical questions will be touched on only so far as seems necessary for the development of the main theme.

The reader should be warned that the conclusions presented under this head are often highly tentative and depend on a delicate balance of probabilities. To have burdened the text with foot-notes would have detracted from its value for those for whom I write, interested readers of the O.T. and students of the English text. The Revised Version has therefore been used as far as possible in quotations.

The book is based on a course of lectures given at Chester in the summer of 1945 under the auspices of St. Christopher's College, Blackheath, then evacuated to that city. The whole has, however, been thoroughly revised and rewritten. Principal W. A. L. Elmslie, of Westminster College, Cambridge, has kindly read and criticised the typescript and I have profited by his criticisms, but of course he is in no way responsible for the opinions expressed.

E. L. ALLEN.

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NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE.

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CHAPTER I

PROPHETS AND PROPHETS

FOR an introduction to that succession of heroes of the spirit with which this study is concerned we are fortunate in being able¹ to turn to one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of religion. I refer to the encounter at the royal shrine of Bethel between Amaziah the priest and Amos the prophet. For our purpose what is of importance in this scene is Amos's disclaimer of the prophetic title : " I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son ; but I was an herdman, and a dresser of sycomore trees : and the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel."¹ He does not belong, that is to say, to any of the prophetic guilds of his time, nor is he what the prophet normally is ; he is a simple man of the people, thrust forth from his daily work to speak in God's name to his fellows. Nevertheless, he cannot describe the mandate he has received except by saying that he must prophesy, and elsewhere among his recorded utterances he accepts for himself the name he rejects on this occasion. When he declares, for example, that " the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets,"² he so speaks only because he includes himself among the servants in question. It is clear, therefore, that the term " prophet " has by this time become in any case ambiguous, and from some points of view, positively objectionable.

In other words, there are prophets and prophets in the Old Testament, and the men whom we distinguish by this name and honour for their work were the exception rather than the rule in their time. We have to reckon with two types of prophecy in ancient Israel, a majority-type and a

¹ vii. 14f. ² iii. 7.

minority-type ; in their own day, the latter group was always unpopular and often in peril ; it was only in after generations that they came into their kingdom in men's minds. How shall we distinguish between these two types?

In the first place, the opposition between them is that between *mass-enthusiasm* and *personal inspiration*. That is most clearly brought out in the concluding chapter of 1 Kings. Ahab sits on his throne with Jehoshaphat by his side ; they are reviewing their armies in preparation for a campaign on the frontier against Syria. As a necessary part of the day's proceedings, Ahab seeks an oracle which will indicate the fortune that awaits him. Four hundred strong, the prophets march into the presence of the kings with their leader at their head and chant in unison an oracle which promises victory. There is something imposing about the collective fervour of these men, the confidence of their leader and the symbolic action with which he accompanies his assurance of success. But Jehoshaphat is represented by the narrator as suspicious ; he values this mass-frenzy but lightly and looks elsewhere for the true prophet. When such a man is found, he is in prison and under the king's displeasure ; he is notorious for oracles which do not chime in with the king's policies, for oracles, moreover, to which he obstinately adheres to his own hurt. He proves true to his reputation and, after an obvious attempt to evade the issue, thunders forth his message of defeat for the army and death to the king. The solitary individual faithful to conscience is pitted against the fanaticism of the four hundred precisely as Elijah on Mount Carmel challenged the frenzy of the Melkart-prophets ; in each case, the event vindicates the one and refutes the many.

In the second place, the opposition is that between *professional* and *personal* prophecy. It is not merely that prophets of the majority-type were venal and prepared, like the fortune-teller in all ages, to adapt their utterances to their income. Micah declares of them that " whoso putteth

not into their mouth, they even prepare war against him,"¹ and the accusation is repeated *ad nauseam* elsewhere. What is meant here is rather that the prophet of what I have called the professional type had his regular and recognised place in the religious organisation of his time ; he was attached to one of the sanctuaries, or even to the Temple, being available for consultations and giving answers in oracular form to specific questions addressed to him by worshippers who came for that purpose. So, for example, the " seer " Samuel can be consulted—for a fee—on a matter of lost property.² When the Shunammite woman announces her intention of seeking Elisha's assistance in her distress, her husband expostulates with her on the ground that it is neither new moon nor sabbath : apparently it was the custom particularly at these times to have recourse to a prophet.³ When Jehu declares his purpose to continue the Tyrian cult which the slaughtered Jezebel had introduced into the land, he does so by a festival at a shrine, where he assembles both priests and prophets, the two classes of officials associated with the cult.⁴ Jeremiah in his denunciation of the profanity in the Temple incriminates equally the prophet and the priest.⁵ It would seem as though there was only a limited amount of originality among these men, for they are accused of appropriating one another's oracles : they " steal my words every one from his neighbour." ⁶ It is significant in this connection that it is in " the house of the Lord " that the encounter takes place between Hananiah and Jeremiah.⁷ Even more important, however, is the information given us in the correspondence which passed between Babylon and Jerusalem as the result of Jeremiah's letter to the deportees of 597. We learn that there was actually a regular discipline of the prophets attached to the Temple and that this was in the hands at that time of a priest named Zephaniah. The

¹ iii. 5 (but see *Moffatt*).

² 1 Sam. ix. 6ff.

³ 2 Kings iv. 23.

⁴ 2 Kings x. 18ff.

⁵ Jer. xxiii. 11.

⁶ xxiii. 30, ⁷ xxviii. 1.

language used is derogatory in the extreme and suggests that the ecstasy characteristic of the prophet brought him into disrepute with his priestly overseers ; it was apparently the practice to curb and even to imprison the ecstatic when his pronouncement tended to disturb the cultus. But action might be taken without any such provocation and on general grounds ; Jeremiah, it is urged, ought to be silenced because his message to the exiles is in itself unacceptable to the authorities.¹ We see, therefore, that even the type of prophecy which most resembles the Near Eastern dervish of to-day was not wholly unregulated, that it was under supervision and organised as an integral part of the national religion and its system of worship. Such freedom as the higher prophecy enjoyed was not granted to it as of right, it was won only as the result of continual struggle.²

But the distinction with which Amos and his successors operated was neither of those with which we have so far dealt. The opposition which dominates their thinking at this point is that between *false* and *true* prophecy. This introduces a value-judgment, whereas we have been concerned hitherto with psychological and sociological factors only. The bands of ecstatics who gathered round Samuel and Elisha show precisely the same mass-emotion as the four hundred who marched behind Zedekiah into the presence of Ahab ; but the school of historians which rejects the latter as spurious does not hesitate to accept the former as genuine. Again, the prophet Nathan is clearly a court-official, one of the king's chaplains, we might say, and he uses his influence as a party-leader to secure the throne for Solomon ; nevertheless, what better instance of prophetic independence have we than his rebuke of David for the affair of Uriah the Hittite ?³ Ahijah, the prophet who foretold the disruption of the kingdom, was resident at Shiloh and could be consulted in case of illness for a fee ;

¹ Jer. xxix. 24ff.

² On the whole subject of this paragraph see Johnson : *The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel* (University of Wales Press Board, 1944). ³ 2 Sam. xii.

but the Deuteronomic historian regards him as giving a divine sanction to Jeroboam's revolt and as the spokesman of Yahweh to Jeroboam's wife.¹ It is clear that there is no criterion which would enable us to distinguish the false prophet from the true ; this, in fact, is what made the meeting of Jeremiah and Hananiah in the Temple-courts so tense and so perplexing a situation.

For the classical statement of how the two are to be distinguished, we turn, of course, to Jeremiah on this occasion. It is important to notice that what he gives us is not an oracle, clothing an authoritative ruling on the problem, but merely the result of his own reflection. He can only appeal to tradition and to the inference to be drawn from this. "The prophets that have been before me and before thee of old prophesied against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of pestilence. The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him."² In other words, doom is the distinguishing feature of authentic prophecy, he who speaks of success is suspect till the event has shown that he was no mere seeker after popular favour.

There is, of course, a considerable measure of truth in such a judgment. Paraphrasing somewhat, we may say that when a man speaks with a breaking heart a message which separates him from his fellows and offers no advantage to himself, we may assume that he would not speak thus were he not driven to it by an inspiration he cannot resist. But if, on the other hand, a man promises what meets the wishes of his hearers and wins him applause, there is at least an even chance that he is a sheer impostor. Nevertheless, we cannot rest content with Jeremiah's solution of the problem. It only appears satisfactory because in his day the prophetic tradition was still in the main one of doom. But what of his hope of the new covenant ? Is this

¹ 1 Kings xiv. 1-17. : xi. 29ff. ² Jer. xxviii. 8f.

to be received with suspicion as a prophecy of peace? Surely not. What, above all, of Second Isaiah with his songs of consolation and his vision of a restored Zion? Must the true prophet *always* speak of doom and *only* of doom? It is the problem of Jonah over again. The prophet's rebuke may move his hearers to repentance, in which case his message will be transformed into a gracious one; but he will still be a true prophet. We need therefore to seek a more satisfactory criterion.

Nor is this difficult to find, if we return in thought to the historical circumstances out of which Israel arose. The tribes at Sinai directly, and those who were subsequently incorporated into the covenant indirectly, became a people in virtue of their relation to Yahweh. In other words, they were primarily a religious, and only secondarily a national, community. But the two aspects of the common life were not differentiated; to the men who broke into the Promised Land to kill and possess, war was worship and the slaughter of prisoners a sacrificial act. The purposes of Yahweh and the policies of the nation were one and the same thing. Now it is the mark of the false prophet that he shares this position with the great mass of his people and with the priestly exponents of its tradition.¹ He is not conscious of the distance between Yahweh and Israel, the possibility of a conflict of wills between the two has not presented itself to him, and perhaps we should add that his mind is effectually closed against any such suggestion. The true prophet, however, has arrived at a point at which the unity of Yahweh and Israel, accepted by all around him, has for him become terribly problematic. An abyss has opened at his feet, for the certainty by which his people have lived for centuries no longer exists for him and he must find a new certainty in its place. Henceforth he must spend his life wrestling with this problem of how to restore the lost unity, how to bring together again the will of Yahweh and the

¹ I here refer, of course, only to the pre-exilic priesthood.

purposes, perhaps the existence, of Israel. For he has seen that Israel might even cease to be and Yahweh would not merely remain untouched ; from the catastrophe he would emerge more glorious than ever before.

We may say therefore that what is all-important here is the *sense of distance* between Yahweh and his people, his freedom over against them, so that he may reject where he has chosen and choose where he has rejected. Amos's threat of doom and Second Isaiah's "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people" are the two forms in which this freedom on the part of Yahweh comes to expression. Sovereign in judgment, he is sovereign also in mercy, and as no covenant can disarm his justice, so no rebellion need finally alienate his compassion. Thus we can now bring the whole course of prophecy within the sweep of our definition and say that the true prophet is one who has, the false prophet one who has not, this sense of distance.

With that, the theme of the chapters which are to follow is given to us. We shall take the six greatest names among the prophets and seek in each case to penetrate to the secret of that experience which sent him out upon his work, and then to ask how each man wrestled with this problem of the relation between Yahweh and his people. The prophet, that is to say, was always a man of two loyalties : rooted as he was in the tradition of his people and passionately devoted to their welfare, he was yet singled out from his fellows to be Yahweh's champion among them and against them. He was conscious that between Yahweh and Israel a breach had opened, that the two could no longer walk together because they were not agreed : others were fatally blind to that situation, but he was called to feel its whole force, to allow it to work itself out in his soul to the last consequences. To the agony, the valour, and in the end, the hopefulness of these men for whom life's two supreme loyalties, to God and to the nation, were so grievously at variance, we now turn.

CHAPTER II

AMOS

IN the vision-narratives of Amos we have a revelation of the experiences which made of him a prophet, but not a transcript of those experiences.¹ Autobiography has become preaching before it reaches us, and the form in which the visions as we have them have been recast is expressly designed to arrest the attention of the hearer. We should probably think of them as retold to the people assembled at one of the great northern shrines on the occasion of some festival; they were evidently related finally in a series, so that the effect is cumulative and the closing scene is one of overwhelming power. There is about the first three visions in particular just such a similarity of pattern as is to be found elsewhere in the book. The clearest instance of that is in the first two chapters, where there is marked parallelism of form in the oracles against the surrounding nations. In the fourth chapter we meet with another series of sayings, each beginning with "I have" and ending with "yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord."

In the second instance, the prophet delivers as it were a succession of sledge-hammer blows, all of the same force. In the case of the oracles on foreign nations, however, his procedure is much more subtle. He aims at the outset at winning the attention of his audience by a series of denunciations directed against the hereditary enemies of Israel and couched in language which might well have come from one of those very prophets from whom he was at such pains to distinguish himself. With what satisfaction would his audience follow him as he enumerates the

¹ vii. 1-3, 4-6, 7-9; viii. 1-3; ix. 1-4.

crimes of Damascus and the other neighbouring states, threatening each in turn with the appropriate punishment ! It is possible, of course, that some of the sections—especially those concerned with Tyre and Edom—have been added later, whether by Amos or a redactor ; the denunciation of Judah clearly falls outside the scheme, with its highly conventionalised phraseology and its colourless tone contrasting so sharply with the oracle on Moab which immediately precedes it. But just as the agreement of the audience with the speaker has reached a maximum and both appear to be occupying common ground in the conviction that Yahweh is a righteous judge of Israel's enemies, the prophet turns to Israel itself and breaks through the scheme with which he has hitherto worked because, as the nation's sin passes all limits, so a destruction is reserved for it which has no precedent.

If now we turn to the three visions of chapter vii we can detect here also something of the same development. The first two belong together and create the background against which the third has to be set if it is to be understood in its decisive significance. Amos begins with a premonition of doom, something which is not likely to have been shared by any of his contemporaries in those halcyon days of Jeroboam II. The first form which the expected catastrophe assumes is a plague of locusts, and at just that season when they would deprive the peasant of fodder for his live-stock. The second form is a vast conflagration which begins by drying up the seas and goes on to threaten with destruction the "portion", presumably the cultivated land of Israel's settlement. In each case the prophet is deeply moved by what he sees and he is under no illusions as to Israel's ability to survive such trials. He has already a sense of Yahweh's majesty which reduces Israel to insignificance ; yet in that very insignificance he finds ground for an appeal to mercy. "O Lord God, forgive, I beseech thee: how shall Jacob stand, for he is small."

The word "forgive" does not imply that Amos has as yet any consciousness of a sin on the nation's part which merits such overthrow ; he is aware only of the peril in which it stands now that Yahweh has risen up in indignation and prays that doom may yet be averted. The very helplessness of Israel in face of Yahweh's might as displayed in the forces of nature is the one remaining reason for a hope that the impending clash between the two may yet be averted. Incidentally, is there not something here which should be allowed to qualify what is usually said of the severity of Amos's conception of God ? It is his nature to deal leniently with what is small and weak.

The prophet, we can see, feels himself bound up with his nation and personally implicated in what befalls it ; he stands in intercession between it and its fate. He has the assurance, too, that his prayer has been heard : twice he is told that what he fears so much is not to happen, that Israel will be spared. When the scene changes and in the third vision a man with a plumb-line in his hand becomes for him significant of something new—Yahweh's judgment on the land and not merely his indignation against it. The question is raised for the first time of how Israel stands the test of Yahweh's righteousness, and to this there can be only one answer. The doom is not now envisaged as a natural calamity but as the ruin of the shrines and the overthrow of Jehu's dynasty in civil strife. It is at these two points most of all—the cultus as practised in the high places and the administration of justice for which the king was ultimately responsible—that Israel falls short of the divine requirement. Now that the question of justice has been raised intercession is no longer possible ; the conscience of the prophet bids him accept the threatened doom as only too richly deserved. Not only so, but something has come to him which demands to be uttered in speech and of which *he* must be the spokesman. Protest would be useless against a natural calamity, but where religion is

false and justice venal rebuke must not be wanting. So Amos knows himself from this moment called to be a prophet to and against his time.

Behind his first public appearance, therefore, lies the agony of soul which is reflected in his account of his first three visions. He had felt deeply, and interceded passionately, for his people, seeking as long as he could to ward off from them the doom which he alone saw to be impending. For reasons not at first revealed to him, Yahweh was about to rise up against Israel ; Amos pleaded with him and his pleading was not in vain. As long as the question was of Israel's survival, he would champion his people ; but when the question of its righteousness was raised, he was perforce silent. For conscience was stronger in this man than even sympathy, and he could not but consent to a divine judgment on a nation whose shrines were centres of immorality and whose rulers grew rich by the oppression of the poor. That distance between Yahweh and the nation of which we spoke above had become for him terribly and fatefully evident : forced to choose between the two, he chose Yahweh and let Israel go.

The whole public ministry of Amos is rooted, of course, in this initial experience and its compulsions. There is, however, one problem connected with it which requires to be dealt with at the outset. Unlike the other prophets with whom we are concerned in this study, Amos, it would appear, was not wholly one with the people to whom he was sent. A man of the South, he "dropped his word" against the North. How are we to account for so curious a phenomenon, especially as by no hint does Amos betray that he is in Israel as a foreigner¹ ; the whole tone of his oracles rather suggests that he lives, moves, and has his being in Israel, so that its sins are his shame and he knows Yahweh primarily as one who is in peculiarly close relations with this people. The absence of any allusion to Judah is striking,

¹ Except possibly for vi. 1 ; i. 2 is editorial.

too, for we have seen that the passage in chapter ii is not genuine : it is unthinkable that Amos should have regarded Judah as beyond blame. As the visions show us, he was conscious at the outset, even when living in the South, of his solidarity with Israel, and it is difficult to believe that his distress and intercession were for a foreign nation. The simplest explanation would be that, while domiciled in Judah, Amos was in fact an Israelite by birth and allegiance, and there is no serious difficulty in the way of accepting this. It would make intelligible what would otherwise be something of a puzzle.

Quite literally, the appearance of Amos at the northern sanctuaries was an event of epoch-making importance in the history of religion. It is easy therefore to overlook the fact that even so independent a spirit as he was deeply indebted to the religious tradition of his people. His conception of Yahweh as manifesting himself in natural convulsions, in earthquake and pestilence, famine and war, is in no sense new. It is only what we meet already in the narrative of the covenant at Sinai, with its setting amid a volcanic eruption, or in the opening lines of the Song of Deborah, with their description of Yahweh's arrival for the succour of his people. The stern features in the portrait of Yahweh as sketched for us by Amos were not introduced by him, they were an integral part of the traditional presentation. The God of whom he speaks is the God who scourged the Egyptians with the plagues and at whose bidding the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.

Nor can we find what is wholly new in Amos in the ascription to Yahweh of righteousness. For the righteousness of Yahweh belonged from the outset to the covenant as the pattern for the relation between him and his people. The covenant brings two parties into such an union that each, in the very act of maintaining his own honour, must at the same time maintain that of the other. Pledges are given and received and when need arises either party can

claim the support of the other as of right. "Justice consists in maintaining one's own honour and that of others in giving and taking in accordance with the position occupied within the covenant." In virtue therefore of the relation established between Israel and Yahweh, the latter was under an obligation to defend the rights of the former against all comers. It was precisely in this that his righteousness consisted. "On righteousness the Israelite founds his trust in life, for also his god makes part of the covenant. When Yahweh storms and thunders in all his terror, then it is always *his* god who maintains his honour. With him he has community, because he is a just god who maintains the covenant in which he stands."¹

But the righteousness of Yahweh was exercised, for the contemporaries of Amos, not only *on behalf of* Israel but also *within* Israel. Here indeed was one of the factors responsible for the emergence of the dynasty to which Jeroboam II belonged. The indignation of Yahweh had been roused against Ahab by the murder of Naboth, and Jehu commended himself to the conscience of the nation by claiming to be his instrument to execute the sentence which Elijah had passed in his name on the guilty house. In the patriarchal narratives Yahweh figures as the protector of the weaker members of the community; he protects Hagar in the wilderness and brings Joseph forth from the dungeon. When he appears in the burning bush to Moses it is as the champion of the slave against his taskmaster, and in the Book of the Covenant man and beast alike are brought under his protection.

In what respect then, it may be asked, did the message of Amos at this point constitute an advance upon the religious beliefs of his time? The answer is that whereas his contemporaries did not doubt that Yahweh was righteous *within* and *for* Israel, Amos saw that he was so righteous *within* Israel that he must be righteous *against* it. His

¹ Pedersen : *Israel*, i-ii, 343, 344f.

righteousness is now to be displayed, not in the vindication of Israel's claims but in judgment on Israel's very existence. It is all a question of what we have spoken of above as the distance between Yahweh and his people ; righteousness in him is absolute, it is not pledged to Israel unconditionally, but is free to operate for or against Israel as its own nature may require. Just because he defends the cause of the poor, the weak and the unfortunate against the holders of power, he cannot accept with equanimity a society in which oppression is the rule and injustice has the sanction of religion. Yahweh's one irrevocable commitment is to righteousness, not as an abstract principle, but as a system of right relations between person and person within Israel and every other community. His plumb-line swings down to test the nation and because it is not upright it must be swept away.

This identification of Yahweh with a righteousness which is absolute and must be maintained at all costs is the new and challenging feature in the revelation of God which came to the herdsman of Tekoa and made him a prophet. It forced upon him a re-interpretation of Israel's past, an estimate of the present which sundered him from his fellows, and an outlook upon the future which left him without hope. He saw with new eyes what the nation had been, what it was, and what would befall it now that the fatal alienation between it and Yahweh had begun.

(i) As he looked back upon the past, he found in it what his contemporaries found, the evidence of Yahweh's choice of Israel to be in some special sense his own. The tradition of the Exodus was an integral part of the national religion and the occupation of Canaan by the Hebrew tribes is cited by the prophet as one of the crowning mercies for which it was indebted to Yahweh.¹ Nevertheless it was unthinkable to him that Israel's status should be that of the favourite of Providence, and he quotes a current saying to this effect only

¹ ii. 9f.

that he may bend it to his purpose and use it to demonstrate something quite different. "Us only has Yahweh known of all the families of the earth"—we can imagine such a saying repeated over and over again in the festivities at one of the great shrines ; it was an explanation of the past which provided an unshakable assurance for the future, and men drew from it the natural conclusion that his protection was to be relied on under all circumstances and against all comers. But Amos did not work with the popular logic, but with a logic of a new order, one which was required by his fundamental conviction of Yahweh's absolute righteousness. "You only have I known," he cried as Yahweh's mouthpiece, "of all the families of the earth—therefore will I visit upon you all your iniquities."¹ Israel's election is not to favouritism and privilege, but to responsibility, and for all that this nation does it will be called to account more severely than others. Yahweh trusted Israel and Israel has betrayed his trust : to such a story there can be only one end, and that is judgment.

In another passage he goes farther still, for even the special mercy of Yahweh in Israel's deliverance from the house of bondage in Egypt appears to be called in question, and all difference between it and other peoples is abolished. "Are ye not as the children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel? saith the Lord." What difference is there in his sight between the people of Samaria and those dark-skinned slaves who are offered for sale in their market ? Yet that does not mean that Yahweh is indifferent to them, but rather that the care they sought to appropriate for themselves is given freely to the alien as to them. It is not that there is no chosen people, but that there is no people that is *not* chosen and precious in Yahweh's sight ; his hand was in the migrations of Israel's hereditary enemies, it was through him that Syrians and Philistines alike left their ancestral homes and settled where they lived in Amos's day.²

¹iii. 1f. ²ix. 7.

One can imagine the reception an Englishman would have met with at the climax of the recent war had he declared that while the hand of God was in the victory of the United Nations, it had been at work also in the Prussian rising against Napoleon and in the modernisation of Japan ! Something of that kind was what Amos was saying to his contemporaries, and we cannot doubt that they resented it.

(ii) The present, too, assumed for the prophet quite a different aspect from that which it disclosed to his fellows, for he alone saw it under the searching scrutiny of Yahweh. He spoke when Jeroboam II was at the height of his military successes, when the people, in fact, were celebrating two notable victories in Trans-jordania, at Lo-debar and Karnaim, if the conjecture is sound which sees two place-names in the original of vi. 13. The historian may point out that there was something fictitious about such military glory as this. Israel was strong only because Damascus had been crushed half a century before and Assyria was at its lowest ebb. Sooner or later, one or both of these powers would revive and Israel would pass from empire to vassalage in a single campaign. But Amos was moved by no such considerations when he broke in upon the public rejoicing with a funeral dirge. A thousand young men are marching past him, with glittering spear and shield, waving farewell to the city that has bred them and now sends them forth, confident all of them in the fortune of their king and the blessing of their god. But as he watches, horror seizes him, and the whole scene is transformed before his eyes. Back through those same streets they come, a hundred wounded, dispirited, stumbling, half-armed men, all that is left of that gay and gallant expedition. "Thus saith the Lord God, The city that went forth a thousand shall have an hundred left, and that which went forth an hundred shall have ten left."¹ Anyone who has had experience of modern war will be able to write his own comment on that

¹ v. 1-3.

terrible 'verse. For myself, I remember a night on the Somme at the end of June 1916 when I stood and watched a division march up to the assault, with maps of Germany in the officers' hands and a notice-board "To Berlin" where they entered the communication trench, and then, twenty-four hours later, in the twilight of July 1st saw an officer lead back the same way all that was left of his battalion, thirty or forty broken men. So Amos envisages the overthrow of Israel; by what human agency they are to be overthrown matters little to him, since the victor will be but an instrument in the hands of Yahweh.

What then of the economic prosperity which accompanied the military expansion of the Northern Kingdom under Jeroboam II? A modern student might be tempted to speak of what happened as an inevitable phase in the country's development, something which had to be gone through if Israel was to be able to hold its own among the powerful neighbours it had in Syria and Phoenicia. With Omri the creation in the North of a centralised state and an urban civilisation had begun, and the affair of Naboth's vineyard was an indication that the day of the peasant proprietor, not so much the owner of the land as the trustee who administered it for his family past and future, was drawing to a close. The effects of an agrarian revolution are described more fully in the pages of Micah and Isaiah, but the denunciations of Amos presuppose in the North a similar state of affairs. Large estates were taking the place of small-holdings and a money economy was working havoc among the agricultural population. It was vain for the dispossessed peasantry to seek redress at law: the speculator who had driven them from their homes was a rich merchant of Samaria, with surplus capital acquired by foreign trade, and he could always buy the verdict he desired. Or where the small proprietor was not dispossessed, he became a tenant-at-will, losing his personal freedom to a large extent and often rack-rented into debt

and finally into slavery. On the other hand, Samaria became the home of a new class with luxurious tastes and extravagant habits: the "ivory house" which was the wonder of the time when Ahab built it had its counterpart now at half a dozen places in the capital city.¹ In these the aristocracy of wealth rioted in heartless extravagance, careless of the misery of the poor. As so often, the women played an unworthy part in this corrupt and selfish society, inciting their husbands to any cruelty, so only they might satisfy their whims.² It is interesting in this connection to observe how two ardent students and enthusiastic advocates of the "new civilisation" of Soviet Russia, after twelve hundred pages of eulogy, devote a paragraph to the danger which may arise from the lack of occupation among wives of commissars, technicians, and others who command exceptional incomes! *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*³

The situation which Amos describes is that of a society divided into exploiters and exploited. What the historian might speak of as national prosperity he sees to be the spoliation of the many for the enrichment of the few, and what some would dismiss as the misfortunes incidental to such a large-scale readjustment of economic activities, he brands as crime and sin. Yet withal his outlook is very different from that of a modern observer of a similar situation, for there is no suggestion in Amos of the class-war. What he foresees is not the overthrow of the exploiters by their victims but a common doom in which all must perish alike. His message is to the nation: Israel sins in the person of the wealthy and suffers in the anguish of the poor; therefore Israel as such and as a whole must perish. There is no discrimination between guilty and innocent, but only a fateful solidarity which binds together all the members of the community and makes the transgression of one the guilt of all. If this is an offence to our more developed

¹ Kings xxii. 39; Amos iii. 15. ² iv. 1-3.

³ Webb, S and B: *Soviet Communism: A New Civilisation* (2nd ed.), 1211.

moral judgment, we need not for all that pretend that it is not an accurate account of how the forces work which shape history ; when catastrophe overwhelms a nation high and low, rich and poor, oppressors and oppressed, are involved in the common destruction.

We have seen that the judgment which Amos passes upon his contemporaries has its origin in his prophetic consciousness and is therefore absolute in character. As such, it is to be distinguished sharply from the findings of the secular historian. This is even more obviously the case when we come to consider the religious situation of his time. It would be a great mistake to accept his fiery denunciations as material for an account of the religious life in Israel under Jeroboam II : to do that would be tantamount to accepting a trooper in Cromwell's Ironsides as an authority on the state of the Church of England in his day ! A man smitten with a passion for absolute righteousness has the defects of his qualities ; he is not capable of dispassionate judgment and sympathetic understanding of the cruder forms of religious experience which are God's communication to some other men.

If we are to think of the stories in Genesis as told at the great high-places when these were crowded with pilgrims, we shall be prepared to recognise in the audiences who delighted to listen to them an appreciation of moral values for which we look in vain in the picture which Amos gives of the popular religion. The narratives of the patriarchs show that personal religion was no discovery of Jeremiah's, as is still too often supposed : Abraham walked with God and Jacob offered his individual petition in the morning-light at Bethel. So the story of Joseph reflects a profound faith in the divine guidance of an individual's life and is the work of one sensitive to so rare a moral achievement as the forgiveness of cruel wrong when revenge was in the wronged man's power. We need not doubt that there was much genuine piety in the Israel of the eighth century B.C. ;

indeed, had not that been the case, how are we to account for the appearance of Amos himself? Granted that we can use no less momentous a word than "revelation" to describe what it was that sent him forth, there are always those factors to be considered through which a revelation is mediated. The best defence that can be offered of the popular religion of Israel is that it nurtured an Amos : without the tradition which it preserved by means of its shrines, its pilgrimages and its sacrifices, his individual vision of God might never have been.

When so much has been said by way of qualification, we have still to do justice to the severity and ample sweep of his denunciation of the piety which satisfied his contemporaries. His charge against it was that it was un-moral, and worse than that, was immoral. The close association of right dealing between man and man with the acknowledgment of Yahweh was of the very essence of Israel's religion, and this may well go back to Moses. But this had disappeared from the actual religion of the high-places and the great national shrines ; the activities which took place there, whatever enthusiasm and zeal might accompany them, fell apart from the conduct of the worshippers within society and its relationships. A man therefore did not blush to drink wine on some festal occasion which was purchased by the exploitation of the weak, nor was he ashamed, when he resorted to the sanctuary for a revelation, to lie down to sleep in a garment pledged by some debtor, in defiance of the old humanitarian rule which bade him return it at nightfall.¹ The most punctilious performance of so-called religious duties became consistent with the most shameless disregard of the claims of one's fellow-man. Into the unholy compact between the unscrupulous speculator and the venal magistrate it seemed as though Yahweh himself had entered, because he was willing to accept sacrifice as compounding for the crimes by which one made, and the other shared,

¹ii. 8.

his gains. The heavenly court was as open to bribery as the earthly ones, apparently.

Against such a suggestion Amos revolted with all the indignation of which his passionate nature was capable. It is foolish to weigh his words and to ask whether he really meant the total abolition of sacrifice. Faced with so gigantic and so soul-destroying an evil as this false religiosity was in his prophetic eyes, he could ask for nothing less than that it should be swept away and not a vestige of it left remaining. Away not merely with altar and sacrifice, away also with pilgrimage and psalm and sanctuary-choir ! was his cry. His grim conviction of impending and total doom saved him from those nice considerations of the future of organised religion and the need for a substitute for sacrifice which his modern commentators are inclined to press upon him. He saw only how Israel's sin, the sin of man against man, had entrenched itself in its religious system, how sacred place and sacred rite had become pretexts for the evasion of the most elementary moral obligations, and suddenly it all became for him monstrous, intolerable, doomed. There is something of the thunder-storm's fury in his cry, as it rang out amid the rejoicings of the pilgrim-crowds :

"I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me your burnt offerings and meal offerings, I will not accept them : neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs ; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."¹

It is surely useless to blunt the force of those words. For Amos, Yahweh's one requirement was righteousness, and that not so much in the sense of personal morality as in that of right-dealing in social relationships between man and man. If we think this position unsatisfactory, we have a right to

say' so, but let us not deny that it is where the prophet himself was content to stand.

I said above that the religion of his day was not only un-moral, divorced, that is to say, from any sense of social responsibility, but that it was also in his eyes definitely immoral. He shudders with horror at what was possible at the shrines with their organised ritual prostitution, and one of his most pregnant expressions is that which brands such action as a profanation of Yahweh's holiness.¹ Already for Amos the nature of Yahweh is such that only what is ethically pure may be associated with him. Nowhere, surely, was Israel's alienation from Yahweh more appallingly evident than in this so-called piety, when there was rendered to him as an act of homage what was in essence an act of defiance.

(iii) As with the present and the past, so with the future : what it was to his contemporaries is no measure of what it was to the prophet. One of the current slogans of the popular religion which he has preserved for us was "The Day of Yahweh." He who said, "The Day of Yahweh" expressed his confidence that future glories would surpass even the notable ones of the present, that triumph would follow upon triumph and Israel's history be consummated, by some great act of Yahweh, in a blaze of unexampled and enduring splendour. Once again, like some assaulting army which occupies the defence-system of the enemy in order to turn it into a bastion against his counter-attack, Amos reversed this expectation and transformed it into a threat. The Day of Yahweh would break soon upon the nation, of that he was convinced, but it would break in storm and tempest and would end in utter desolation. "Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?"²

Of doom Amos is certain, but of the precise form which that doom will take he is uncertain. He pictures it now

¹ii. 7. ²v. 20.

as an earthquake, in which the mansions of the wealthy topple and fall, while armies, panic-stricken, take to flight ; again it is pestilence, so that the few survivors will be buried in silence, lest some word on their part should draw attention to them and bring down the wrath of Yahweh to their utter destruction ; at another time, he sees an invading army march across the land and return home with its train of captives, among them¹ the high-priest of Bethel and the star-god worshipped at his shrine.¹ But the most vivid and forceful of his predictions are even more boldly outlined ; one sees how dread and inescapable the doom is which waits for Israel in its injustice and pride.

In the first of these, we are out in the lonely countryside by the Jordan with its tangled thickets, the home of wild beasts. A passing traveller starts back with horror and flees for his life as a lion leaps out upon him ; stumbling madly along, he almost falls into the arms of a bear. What is that a little further along the track ? A peasant's cottage. If he can but reach it, he will be safe. Yes, he is in it, and he flings the door to behind him, leaning against the wall to draw breath after his fright and flight. He is safe at last ! But even as the thought passes through his mind a snake coiled between the stones bites him and he falls dead !² The most that Israel can hope for is some momentary relief, a hope that will cheat it for a while but will not ward off its ultimate destruction.

The second transports us probably to Bethel, or at any rate to one of the great national shrines. It is a feast-day and the pilgrims throng the sanctuary. All at once the earth reels beneath them, the pillars crash on their heads and the roof comes tumbling down upon them. Panic-stricken, they turn to flee. At the doors and all round the building armed men stand who cut them down as they seek to escape. In the confusion, some are able to break

¹ iii. 15, ii. 13-16 ; vi. 9f ; vi. 14, vii. 17, v. 26f.

² v. 19.

through. But where is there a place of refuge for them? Let them ascend to the stars or dig into Sheol, the divine vengeance will pursue them and find them out. Let a man leap into the sea, and the serpent coiled in its depths will stir and bite him. The import of the prophecy is the same as in the previous case; sheer, pitiless, inevitable, total doom is what Amos foresees.¹

As far as Israel is concerned, Amos stands at the end of history. After him, the deluge. And this time there will be no survivors. He had not wished it to be so, he had in fact struggled to prevent it and at first he succeeded. But with the realisation of Israel's radical injustice he surrendered. The prophet is a man who is caught up into the council of Yahweh, who overhears the debate which precedes the divine decision. Into what strange and awe-inspiring debate was Amos introduced in his hour of initiation? There was a conflict, he saw, in the divine mind. For Yahweh has two things which he prizes above all others in this world. One is Israel and the other is righteousness. For generations these two have been united, but now they must part company. Between Israel and righteousness Yahweh must choose, he cannot have both. Therefore he chooses righteousness and lets Israel go. The council was over and Amos went forth to declare what he had seen. He told the choice of Yahweh and consented inwardly to it himself as he told it, whatever it might cost him to do so. But one thing he could not tell—what the choice had cost to Yahweh in the first instance. One half of the message was enough for him to endure; another man's heart must bleed that he might be made ready to understand and tell the rest.

¹ix. 1-4. I regard the concluding verses of the book (ix. 11-15, perhaps 8b-15) as much later than Amos.

CHAPTER III

HOSEA

THE book of Amos presents us with no literary problem of major importance, for it is fairly obvious that the final verses, with their promise of restoration and prosperity without any repentance preceding them, are from a later hand. The case is different with his successor, just because his most intimate personal experience is an essential part of his prophetic ministry. As an introduction to our study of Hosea's message to the nation we must attempt a reconstruction of the tragedy in his home.

We have before us two narratives, one in the first chapter and one in the third, and the initial problem is that of the relation between the two. One particular version of what happened has won such wide acceptance that it may fairly be described as the traditional one. According to this, chapter iii is to be read as the sequel to chapter i. After he has married Gomer and she has borne him children—or a child, for some would put the discovery earlier and others later—he becomes aware of her infidelity. “The three births must have taken at least six years; and once at least, but probably oftener, Hosea had forgiven the woman, and till the sixth year she stayed in his house. Then either he put her from him, or she went her own way. She sold herself for money, and finally drifted, like all of her class, into slavery.”¹ In the sequel, the prophet purchases back his erring wife and takes her again to his home; yet for the present she is under discipline, and he does not consort with her himself while he keeps her from any other. His hope is that she will see in this mingled restoration and estrangement the effort of love to win her from her past

¹ G. A. Smith : *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*, vol. i., 240.

and make her worthy once more of her place in the home.

What, however, is the justification for treating iii in this way as the continuation of i? Against it is to be set something which G. A. Smith has apparently overlooked. The narrative in i is told *of* Hosea in the third person, that in iii *by* Hosea in the first person. A single continuous narrative, interrupted presumably by an editor who inserted the oracles of i. 10—ii. 23, would not thus have passed over in the middle from the biographical to the autobiographical form. Again, the description of Gomer in iii. 1 is in substance identical with that in i. 2, for the word translated "friend" in the former passage has the widest possible reference in Hebrew for anyone with whom one stands in some relationship, and in Jer. iii. 20 is used explicitly for "husband."¹ Had Gomer been in the meantime sold into slavery, one would naturally have looked for some allusion in iii. 1 to her new status; there is none. It may be urged, of course, that the wording of iii. 1 implies that an old relation is to be re-established, so that G. A. Smith translates: "Once more go, love a wife, etc."² But, in the first place, this might more legitimately be taken to mean that a quite new marriage is contemplated, and that once again Hosea is to unite himself with a woman of proved disloyalty: in the second place, the adverb in question might well be accounted for as the insertion by a redactor of a connecting-link with a view to establishing just that continuity which has to be proved if the traditional reconstruction is to be accepted. Such details are clearly of no force in this connection.

It would seem better therefore to accept the two narratives as duplicate versions of one and the same story, iii being Hosea's own account while i is by a later hand. But before attempting to re-tell the story in the light of this hypothesis, we have to deal with a difficulty of a moral

¹ The meaning will be: a woman beloved by her husband *yet* an adulteress. G. A. Smith accepts this as possible in his footnote.

² *op. cit.*, 249.

order. Is it really conceivable that Hosea should have felt himself divinely bidden to marry a wife notorious for her infidelity and with children born out of wedlock? For this is what i. 2 implies if taken literally: the "children of whoredoms" are not those whom Gomer subsequently bears to the prophet but were hers while the unfaithful partner of some other man. It is simplest to suppose that we have here an instance in which the prophet reads back into the inaugural experience something to which he only came in after years. Looking back, he saw in the original command to unite himself with Gomer what later issued from that action. So we all, as we review our lives, tend to see the end in the beginning and the divine intention as leading us from the first whither we were to arrive at the last. Hosea was sure that his marriage had the sanction of Yahweh when he entered upon it, and when it brought to him agony of spirit, an acute problem was raised. Had he been mistaken then in his understanding of Yahweh's will? He could only silence his doubts and answer this question in the negative as he told himself that Yahweh had *meant* him to find these disappointments and heart-aches, so that by them he might draw him to himself. This view was accepted by the disciple who wrote i. Perhaps there is something in Hebrew thinking which makes such a conclusion easy. At any rate we seem to have a parallel in the concluding verses of Isaiah's account of his call,¹ for it is unthinkable that he entered upon his work as one commissioned to aggravate his people's sin: in after years he came to see that that was all he had been able to accomplish. The Marcan theory of parables is probably to be accounted for in the same way: because Jesus taught and was rejected, men came to speak as though he had taught *in order to be rejected*.

We assume, therefore, that the marriage of Hosea and Gomer was not different from any other, that there was no

¹ Isaiah vi. 9f.

suspicion on the one side and no shameful past on the other. Only if this was the case could the union between these two have come to symbolise the relation between Yahweh and Israel. The nation was bound in loyalty to Yahweh at the Exodus and it was only subsequently, at the Settlement, as Hosea will explain, that infidelity and disloyalty began. What we have in iii is what Hosea thought important in the life which followed, what led him to an understanding of how Yahweh will deal finally with Israel in a judgment that is also mercy. What we have in i is what seemed to another of importance, the birth of his three children and the message of doom which the prophet was charged to deliver. We have only to suppose that the more public aspects of Hosea's life were noted by his disciples and that he himself has left on record his most poignant experience, in order to fuse the two narratives which have come down to us into one.

Hosea married Gomer, then, under some circumstances which required of him the payment in kind of which he speaks in iii. 2. Three children were born of the marriage and each one was accompanied at birth by some premonition of judgment and doom which found expression in the name which he gave to the child. It is not necessary to suppose that there is a *double entendre* in the second and third names, as though Hosea was conscious at one and the same time of the illegitimacy of the children and of the rejection of his people. In view of the Hebrew conception of corporate personality and the reference in Hosea's own prophecies to Israel as Yahweh's child, we should have expected that the name of Lo-ammi would rather have been Lo-beni, leaving the inference to the nation to be drawn. Nor does the second name suit any better, for after the birth of Lo-ruhamah Hosea continued to consort with his wife; in other words, he did have mercy. Eventually, however, Hosea learned to his distress that either these three or some of them or others born after them—we have no means of choosing between these alternatives—were not

his own but "children of whoredoms." It was then that he came to think that Yahweh's hand had been in this from the beginning, that the marriage had been willed by him, and just such a marriage as this had proved to be. How he was led to this conclusion we can gather from his prophecies ; unable to abandon the woman who had wronged him so much, he saw in a flash that even so Yahweh could not and would not forsake even disloyal Israel. The judgment of which he, the prophet, had formerly spoken would therefore not be final, but Yahweh's mercy would turn it to discipline and deliverance. It was this new and wonderful vision of the divine purpose which reconciled him to his lot. We need not ask whether it was his discernment of Yahweh's forgiveness of Israel that came first or his own willingness to forgive his erring wife ; it is simplest to suppose that the two were one and the same experience for him.

If Hosea's story is as set out thus, one most important consequence remains to be drawn. This is that we have no knowledge of Hosea's call to prophecy, but only of how he was led, at the commencement of the second phase of his ministry, to a new understanding both of his task and his message. The supposition that his call came as the command to marry Gomer loses all force when it is admitted that the two accounts of that marriage which we have are both written when after-events had profoundly affected the prophet's judgment on his marriage. The only indication we have of what impelled Hosea to prophesy is in the name of his first-born son : that implies just such a presentiment of utter doom as we have found in Amos. Indeed, there might be an echo in i. 4 of the words of his predecessor : " I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."¹ What is new is that the atrocities which accompanied Jehu's *coup d'état* are singled out as the ground of condemnation, whereas at the time they were accepted as Yahweh's prosecution of the blood-feud against Ahab as the murderer

¹ Amos vii. 9.

of Naboth.¹ In what follows, therefore, I shall proceed on the assumption that there were two clearly-marked phases in the ministry of Hosea, so that while in the first he was a messenger of judgment only, in the second he had a hope to offer to his people. What marked the turning-point between the two was his discovery of Gomer's infidelity, the frightful discovery that the very sins which were destroying the nation were also established in his own home. The advantage of such a scheme is that it enables us to do full justice to the two sets of oracles to be found in his book, the one threatening annihilation in as unqualified a manner as anything in Amos and the other promising the survival of a chastened and reduced Israel. Not of course that every hopeful verse is to be accepted as authentic : I am inclined, for example, to reject the last chapter as a later addition. But there is no need to resort to the desperate expedient of removing as interpolations everything that points to Hosea's being something more than a prophet of doom.

In the first phase, to be sure, his attitude to his time was that of Amos before him : Yahweh was about to rise up in judgment against king and people, priest and altar. He had one great advantage over his predecessor, however, inasmuch as contemporary events were on his side. The halcyon days of Jeroboam II were over, both Assyria and Syria had revived, and the Northern Kingdom was reduced again to its true proportions. The dynasty of Jehu was in peril and Hosea's eldest son cannot have been many years old when the expectation embodied in his name found fulfilment. From that point onward, the nation became the victim of its armed forces ; a successful commander in the intermittent warfare characteristic of the time would make a bid for the throne, march on the capital, murder the king and take his place, till either he himself or his son was dispossessed in turn by the next adventurer.

What fascinates Hosea, however, is not the outward

¹ 2 Kings x. 10. °

disorder of his time but its inner corruption. Without venturing upon anything so rash as a psycho-analysis of an ancient prophet known to us only through a fragmentary and badly-preserved record, we can say that Hosea was a man in whom the sex-impulse was peculiarly strongly developed. No other writer in the Old Testament makes so liberal a use of metaphors drawn from this area of life : if Ezekiel is here coarse and repulsive, Hosea's words vibrate with personal emotion and horror at the evils which are about him. Yet, in spite of his loathing for the sex-abominations perpetrated at the shrines, he draws on this same sphere of sexual relationships for categories to describe how Israel stands to Yahweh. The frankness of his language is, of course, in accordance with ancient standards of taste but it offends against ours and we need to find a phraseology of our own to express what he sought to convey by his. We can best speak, perhaps, of the falsification in course of time of that original relation to Yahweh by which Israel was constituted as a people and of the total perversion of that life as the inevitable consequence of this. While Hosea does not speak expressly of the covenant at Sinai, what he has in mind can be stated easily in terms of this. Israel came into being by the acceptance of him as King and the pledge to serve him to the uttermost ; in the wilderness, the fathers offered their hearts to worship him and their bodies to do battle for his honour. But now the covenant has been broken and Israel follows purposes of its own which are not those of Yahweh, it has found other allegiances more attractive and now finally disdains to live by any allegiance at all. That being so, the bond of union and the secret of the nation's strength is lost, man is no longer bound to man in mutual recognition, and what was once a common life now disintegrates before the prophet's eyes into a riot of individual impulses and a war of group-interests. It is that destruction of the earlier harmony, the alienation of Yahweh and Israel, of which we have spoken

before. For Hosea, this is nothing less than the loosening of the foundations of national life, and it cannot now be long before the whole structure tumbles to earth in ruin.

This abandonment of the ancient loyalties and pieties can be seen at work principally in two spheres, the first that of religion and morality, the second that of the State and its policies. We will deal with each of these in turn.

(i) The settlement in Canaan brought with it an encounter between two peoples, one of whom possessed a low civilisation and a comparatively high religion, while the other was characterised by a high civilisation and a low religion. While we must not underestimate the amount of fighting which would be necessary before the invaders established themselves in the hill-country, the final outcome seems to have been a fusion of the two peoples in which the higher religion was largely surrendered to the lower. The Hebrews found the fertility-cults which centred round the local high-places and their Baalim already in possession as an integral part of the life of the agricultural communities amid which they came. When they themselves settled down on the land and took over the techniques of an agricultural civilisation, these included the rites which promoted the fertility of the soil equally with the customary procedures in cultivating it. Each village had its Baal as the owner of the soil and the new occupants, having conquered the land in the name of Yahweh, naturally enough worshipped him as *their* Baal, *their* divine lord, and did so with the rites already associated with each high-place. The whole process came about unconsciously and there was no notion that in doing thus they were forsaking the god who had brought them through the wilderness to their new home. It was a syncretism which has many parallels in history, notably in the identification of Shinto gods and Buddhist saviours at the conversion of Japan and in the assimilation of the veneration of saints to the existing hero-cults when Southern Europe accepted Christianity. The early tradi-

tions of Israel preserve in many places a memory of how Canaanite shrines were taken over by the Yahweh-religion : the Gideon-stories may contain as many as three accounts of how the family and tribal sanctuary at Ophrah grew out of a simple rock-altar on which offerings of food and drink were laid before a Canaanite deity whose name is probably preserved in the second half of the title Yahweh-shalom.¹

It was Hosea who first saw clearly that what came about in this way was in fact the betrayal of the wilderness religion. While he has little to say of the content of that religion, he regards the assimilation of it to the fertility-cults as sheer apostasy. When the worshippers at the feast-days made their thank-offerings at the local shrines, they were—in his judgment—taking the gifts of Yahweh and using them in the service of another. “She did not know that I gave her the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and multiplied unto her silver and gold, which they used for Baal.”² He who would assess a religion, that is to say, must not consider by what name the god is addressed, but what functions and what character are ascribed to him. The rites connected with the fertility-cults were frequently immoral ; in virtue of the principle of sympathetic magic, sexual licence was employed to stimulate the growth of the seed in the soil. Here was something which for Hosea was wholly alien to Yahweh, and the performance of such a rite in his name did not prevent its being a profanation of his holiness, to use the language of Amos. What Israel did at the Settlement was therefore to abandon one religion for another, or as Hosea would say, one god for another. In all this, something more serious is discerned than Amos saw : Israel has not merely repudiated Yahweh by overt misconduct, but has in fact chosen another as lord before him, even while his name is still on the people’s lips.

The inevitable consequence of this defection from Yahweh as an ethical god is the inner decay of society, and of this

¹ Judges vi. 11-24 ; 25-32 ; viii. 22-28.

² ii. 8.

Hosea is every day the witness. With immorality established at the centre of the nation's religion, how can it be prevented from invading the home? Perhaps Israel was at first so healthy and virile a people that even such practices did not corrupt it, but no forces of resistance are now available. The whole life of the nation, as the prophet sees it, is rotten within by reason of this pervasive immorality, and it is useless to complain of infidelity in the family when sexual immorality is publicly organised in the name of religion.¹ Yahweh himself will not intervene in a nation which has so willed its own corruption.

With lust intemperance is associated and the two together "take away the understanding."² Between them they make of Israel a senseless people, blind to moral considerations and bereft of political wisdom. In one passage which, though seriously corrupt, retains enough of its original force to enable us to realise what power must have lain in the prophet's words, Hosea describes how a *coup d'état* is timed to take place at a banquet, when the king in his drunken stupor falls a victim to his own officers.³ Such an incident may have occurred more than once during his life-time. The anarchy of the time has its roots in its moral corruption and disintegration, and that again derives from a false religion. The *fons et origo* of Israel's woes is that *it has abandoned an ethical for a natural religion*. For a god of social morality men have taken a god of corn and wine and oil, for the obedience of the will they have substituted a ritual in which man degrades himself to the level of the blind forces which work in the earth.

Is there no way back from this initial error? Will not repentance avail to undo what has been done? Alas! there is no such hope, for the people have become so perverted as to have lost understanding of what constitutes repentance. Even when they respond to the prophet's appeal, they do so in language which shows how insensitive they are to moral

¹iv. 14. ²iv. 11.c ³vii. 3-7.

realities ; they can only conceive of Yahweh's mercy as they assimilate it to the processes of nature. We may sing in our churches :

Come, let us to the Lord our God

With contrite hearts return,

but what is lacking in Israel's address to Yahweh is precisely this contrition. There is an easy assurance about it all : his goodness will follow his severity as one season follows the other, and nothing is said of how men are to prepare their hearts to meet him. " He hath torn, and he will heal us ; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." Yes, they actually borrow from the ritual of a spring-festival, with a dying and reviving god at the centre of it, and suppose that no more will be involved in his forgiveness. " After two days will he revive us ; on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before him." It is merely a question of time ! And they can count on this God who revealed himself in flame and earthquake on Sinai, this God who answered Elijah by fire—they can count on him as one does on the sunrise to-morrow morning or the rainy season at its place in the year ! " His going forth is sure as the morning : and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter rain that watereth the earth."¹ So speaks a people that has long since lost touch with moral realities.

(ii) In the second place, we may say of Hosea what Victor Hugo says of Isaiah, that he " stands at the gate of civilisation and refuses to go in." What others accounted progress was for him but a fresh sign of defection and apostasy. He is of the same temper as the writer of the document in I Samuel for which Israel was meant to be and to remain a theocracy so that the choice of a human ruler was treason against Yahweh. King and nobility are among the features of Israel's present life which have to be abandoned if ever it is to find Yahweh again.² Israel has forgotten her Maker and built palaces—or should we

¹ vi. 1-3. ² iii. 4.

translate here "temples" ?¹ In either case, the pretentious buildings which accompany an advance in civilisation are stigmatised as sin against Yahweh. Israel has dabbled in world-politics and laid claim to a status which it can never hope to maintain ; questions of foreign policy are debated in the capital and the pro-Assyrian party is in conflict with the pro-Egyptian one.² Treaties are negotiated and economic considerations determine policy, precisely as they do to-day.³ With her destruction approaching, Israel can find no better resource than to play the old game of power-politics at which she is always beaten.

I have taken the view above that Hosea is among those who repudiate the monarchy outright. The passages from which this inference is drawn are by no means free from corruption and their interpretation is therefore somewhat uncertain. To be sure, the monarchy as Hosea knew it was no blessing : if Yahweh gave kings in his anger, he took them away in his wrath.⁴ In other words, neither the one who usurped the throne nor the other who dispossessed him in his turn had any moral justification for his rule nor anything to contribute to the welfare of the nation. In the same way, the expression : "They have set up kings, but not by me ; they have made princes, and I knew it not" may not refer to the institution of the monarchy but perhaps should be understood against the background of contemporary events.⁵ If we could be sure of what is implied in the reference to Gibeah as the beginning of Israel's sin, we could be more confident in our interpretation of other passages.⁶ But here also there is an ambiguity, since the reference need not be to Gibeah as the native town of Saul but might equally well be to the hideous incidents recorded in the concluding chapters of Judges.

What should perhaps incline us towards the view taken above is that Hosea undoubtedly carries back the sin of his

¹ viii. 14.

² vii. 8-11.

³ xii. 1.

⁴ xiii. 11.

⁵ viii. 4.

⁶ x. 9.

day to earlier phases in the history of his people. In one passage he contrasts the original purity of the nation in the wilderness-period with the deterioration which came over it at its encounter with the fertility-cults of Moab.¹ This indeed we have seen to be in accordance with his basic conceptions. There are various scattered allusions to the patriarch Jacob which might well be fragments of an oracle which was intended to draw a comparison between him and his descendants. Perhaps the deception he practised on his brother is to be thought of as something which re-appears in the people who bear his name, but here again the obscurity of the text makes it inadvisable to hazard any conjecture as to the use the prophet intended to make of the story.² It is sufficient for our purpose to note that for Hosea the sin of the present springs out of the past and has become so ingrained that repentance is not to be hoped for. It is as though Israel were possessed by a spirit of perversity; habits of evil are now so fully formed and have such a hold upon the people that the will to return has become virtually impossible for them. "Their doings will not suffer them to turn unto their God."³

One more feature of the life of the time falls to be considered under this head. I refer to the state-shrines, the developed cults at Samaria and Bethel which had the official approval of the regime as well as the favour of the masses. The bull-worship associated with the great national centres especially provokes the indignation of our prophet: with him we find already that mockery of human workmanship which is so characteristic of the later polemic against idolatry. The images of Samaria receive worship as gods but they are in fact a sorry human device. In the single incisive sentence: "The workman made it, and it is no god," Hosea concentrates all his conviction of the gulf which separates the divine from the human, his contempt for all that pretends in any way to the majesty of Yahweh while being only man-

¹ ix. 10. ² xii. 3, 7. ³ v. 4; iv. 12.

made.¹ The god he worships is an imageless god, one, that is to say, who is beyond expression in any form borrowed from the material world.² What alone communicates him to men is the obedience which responds to his revealed will, the love which answers to his covenant-love.

For the sin of Israel lies here more than anywhere else, in the failure to know Yahweh and to serve him as he desires to be served. Knowledge of him is wanting in the land and among all classes.³ How otherwise could men associate him with the licentious rites of the Baal-sanctuaries and the idols of Samaria? Had they but a glimmering of his nature and character, they would not chase after foreign assistance nor suppose that injustice and organised violence could escape his notice. In vain has he showered his goodness upon them and appealed to them by his prophets:⁴ the most lavish instruction he could offer would be frustrated by a deep inward alienation on their part.⁵

Hosea's great word in this connection is *hesed*, love or mercy. Here again the context in which the word must be set is that of a covenant-relationship. When two parties are in this way bound together, each is pledged to come to the assistance of the other at need and to maintain permanently this good-will and readiness to help: he pledges *hesed* to the other. So Abraham's servant can appeal to the god of his master to show *hesed* and to help him find a wife for the son of that master,⁶ and David, about to perform an act of singular magnanimity towards any survivors from the family of Saul, speaks of it as *hesed elohim*, or such kindness as a god would show.⁷

The whole history of Israel was fraught with evidence of just such assistance given by Yahweh to his people in fidelity to the covenant-relationship into which he had brought them. From the Exodus onwards he had sustained them by his power, defended them against their enemies,

¹ viii. 4-6. ² xiii. 1f. ³ iv. 1. ⁴ vi. 5. ⁵ viii. 12.

⁶ Gen. xxiv. 12. ⁷ 2 Sam. ix. 3.

and preserved them through countless perils. Of the divine *hesed* there was therefore no doubt and due recognition of it was made in the worship of the sanctuaries. But what of Israel's *hesed* towards Yahweh? Had the nation shown that loyal love and that steadfast fidelity which were the human side of the covenant-relationship? Had Israel forsaken all other gods and served him only? What Hosea demands for Yahweh is something which transcends our Western distinction between affection and duty, just as he did not separate these two in his conception of what should obtain between husband and wife. It is an inward devotion which issues naturally in outward obedience. And this is what is lacking in Israel; this is the one thing wanting, for the absence of which no sacrifices can compensate.¹

But in accordance with the pattern of thinking which recurs throughout the Old Testament, man's relation to God is closely bound up with his relation to his fellow-men, so that a defect in the one necessarily vitiates the other. So here. When Hosea finds 'no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land,'² he is thinking of the *hesed* between man and man within Israel which should issue from and express the *hesed* which binds Israel and Yahweh together. There is everywhere a failure in the discharge of those duties which unite person to person within society—respect for human life and for the pledged word, the sanctity of the home and reverence for an authority beyond the human. There is only one adequate analogy to all this and it is the one which suggests itself immediately to the prophet. It is as if in a home husband and wife have lost the mutual confidence and fidelity which bound them together at the first, so that their children come to lack all inner security and the home disintegrates into a mere collection of self-seeking individuals.

We moderns would say that when a society is thus blind to moral realities it must inevitably work out its own

¹ vi. 6. ² iv. 1.

destruction. Hosea's denunciations are couched in more personal terms and he proclaims the divine reaction in indignation against this whole series of infidelities and apostasies. The price which has to be paid for a personal conception of God is that his judgment on sin comes to be assimilated to our human resentment against injury, our vindication of our own honour and prestige. Nevertheless, the price is well worth paying. Where the divine reaction against sin is thought of as the operation of something like a law of nature, there is no room for forgiveness. That is only possible within a personal relationship.

The divine anger therefore flames out against Israel and nothing can avert the doom which hangs over the guilty nation. In this first phase of his career, Hosea is as ruthless in his condemnation and as despairing in his outlook as ever Amos was ; annihilation is the fate in store for Israel. Where he differs from his predecessor is that the doom of which he speaks is more clearly outlined before his eyes : political developments in the intervening period have made it evident that foreign invasion and exile will be the forms assumed by Yahweh's judgment. The feverish intrigues by which the Northern Kingdom seeks to attach itself, now to one and now to another of the two great powers between which it is set do but hasten the day when it will be trampled under foot by one of these, a helpless victim. It would seem indeed as though Hosea is not sufficiently well informed of the relative strengths of Egypt and Assyria to be sure which of these will be the eventual conqueror of Israel, so that he envisages at one time the possibility that Egypt may be the land of exile.¹ There is a certain grim justice in such a prospect, of course, as though Yahweh were to recall the mercy he showed at the Exodus and to send back to the house of bondage a people who have proved themselves unworthy of freedom. But in either eventuality, the whole state-

¹ ix. 3, 6.

apparatus will be abolished and with it organised religion as the worshippers at the sanctuaries know it will come to an end.¹ The strongholds will be stormed by the enemy to the accompaniment of frightful atrocities, the shrines will be left abandoned and become overgrown with thorns and thistles, while ignominy and terror attend the abolition of bull-worship.² In a far and profane land the harvest-festivals will cease altogether, mourning will take the place of mirth, and men will have to eat bread made of corn that has never been consecrated to Yahweh.³ We need not see in these words evidence that Hosea himself valued the sacrificial ritual ; he is putting himself for the time being in the place of those whose whole life is organised around the cultus. He sees the rage of Yahweh as comparable only with that of a wild beast intent on devouring its prey. The accumulated sins of the past must now be brought to a reckoning. For one awful moment, Yahweh sees the nation on the verge of the abyss ; he pauses ; is he at the last moment to hold back the forces of destruction and save them from the mouth of the grave ? No, he cannot, for that would be to deny his own justice. There can be no change of mind, rather will he summon the powers of death and the underworld to execute his purpose of wrath against the nation he once chose but must now for ever disown. So the prophet closes his heart against hope : the divine decision, once formed, is irrevocable and Israel must perish.⁴

Yet, as we have seen, that was not in fact his final word. Something happened to suggest to him that Yahweh will use chastisement, not for the destruction of his people, but for their discipline and renewal. What was this ? It seems to have been at the outset Hosea's own experience of fatherhood which brought to him this further revelation. In one of the most tender passages of the Bible, he describes Ephraim as the child whom his father brought up out of

¹iii. 4. ²x. 14, 8, 5. ³ix. 1-5. ⁴xiii. 7-14.

Egypt and who, in the early years of the nation's history, learned under that father's guidance to take his first hesitating steps. There stands the father, watching the child learning to walk and ready, when he stumbles, to pick him up and gather him to his arms. But alas ! the child is self-willed from the outset and deaf to his father's voice ; he turns his steps away from him rather than towards him. If only he had hearkened, if only he had responded to the love which waited upon him from the beginning !¹

If we may fill in with conjecture one of the gaps in the prophet's sad life-story, we may suppose that it was this affection for his children which enabled him to show such magnanimity towards his wife when he discovered how disloyal she had been to him. The shock which he suffered must have been a terrible one indeed. He found that precisely that evil which his whole being loathed and in which he saw at once the source of social corruption and the symbol and evidence of Israel's disloyalty to Yahweh was established within his own home. As we have seen, the only way in which he was able to reconcile himself to this was by the conviction that it was meant to be, that Yahweh willed his servant to experience to the utmost what the sin of the nation was and what confusion it had brought in its train. Nor need we quarrel with that judgment in its essentials, for the divine yearning over Israel and humanity could not be fully appreciated save by one who knew what it was to give love and have it repaid with gross disloyalty.

We cannot doubt that Hosea went through intense agony of spirit when he learned that he had thus been put to shame in his own house. The opinion of his time would have approved of stern measures : the penalty of death is prescribed both in the Deuteronomic code and in the Law of Holiness, and may well have been customary at a much earlier date.² Divorce would have been singularly

¹ xi. 1-3. ² Deut., xxii. 22 ; Lev. xx. 10.

lenient treatment of the offender. And the logical inference from his preaching up to this point would have been that he should mete out to his unfaithful wife just such stern retribution as Yahweh was to send upon his unfaithful people.

Perhaps we have a reflection of this conflict in the moving passage which describes Yahweh's own hesitation between punishment and forbearance. As the hour of destruction approaches, the divine father finds it impossible wholly to abandon his child, and he draws back from the terrible design. "I am God, and not man": human standards, that is to say, are not applicable to Yahweh, and in him the natural resentment against injury done to his honour is subdued to higher and worthier considerations.¹ We are introduced here into an anguish in the divine heart, but our guide is the suffering through which the prophet passed in his own stricken home. "I am God, and not man": he realised that there is a higher moral level than that of just indignation and punishment of wrongdoing, and that he was called to rise to it. It was suggested above that Hosea's understanding of Yahweh's will towards Israel and his discernment of how he should act towards his wife advanced *pari passu*. But we can imagine how, when he was confronted in his home with the sin he had condemned abroad, he came to see that some other weapon must be employed against it than that of mere judgment. For judgment can destroy but cannot redeem, and when one has bound oneself to another, can one consent to let that other go from one's life with no hope whatsoever of redemption? He could not, and Yahweh could not either. So, while he still could not hide from himself that the overthrow of Israel would be as terrible as it was imminent, there was the possibility that Yahweh would use even so great a catastrophe for the ultimate deliverance of the nation to which he had committed himself and which he could not surrender.

¹ xi. 8f.

This meant, of course, a new conception of the bond which united Yahweh and Israel. It was no longer something to be taken for granted, it was marvellous and unexpected, grounded in his goodness alone. When Israel broke the covenant-relation Yahweh continued to play his part faithfully. That there would be a future for the nation was guaranteed by nothing save his mercy.

Modern commentators may be justified in breaking up chapter ii into a series of disconnected oracles, in the sense that they were composed at different times and are only collected here by an editor. Nevertheless, they are bound together by a certain unity of theme, they present Hosea's picture of the future, once this had become a hopeful one. Disaster will come but it will be made to serve the purposes of mercy ; it will be a process of purification for the nation, which will emerge from it reduced and shattered, but disciplined to wisdom at last.

All turns here upon the corruptions which were introduced into Israel's religion by the Settlement and the adoption of agriculture as the way of life. Presumably as the result of just such a foreign invasion as Hosea contemplated in the earlier phase of his ministry, the land will go out of cultivation and the seasonal festivals will be brought to an end. There will be no more merry thanksgivings at the local shrines, for the cornfields will lie untilled and wild beasts will haunt the slopes which were once covered with the vine. More than that, it would seem that the depopulation of the land will follow on the war, and the few who escape the sword will take refuge beyond Jordan. In a word, the agricultural civilisation of Canaan will come to an abrupt end and Israel will revert to its earlier condition as a small nomad tribe. The stream of history will turn back upon its sources, the accumulated gains of centuries—as men call them—will be swept away, and Israel will stand again exactly where it stood when it came out of Egypt. The whole vicious past must be undone

so that Israel may be able to go back and begin all over again.

When that happens, Yahweh will have the opportunity for which he has waited so long. He will be able to renew the old relation with his people and this time to win them permanently for himself. Stripped of its possessions, Israel will turn to him ; forcibly separated from the Baal-cults, men will remember that all they received was from his bounty and will repent of the gross ingratitude by which they used his gifts for an immoral worship which could not represent his holy will. The marriage of Yahweh and Israel will be renewed and the wife will know now to whom she has bound herself and will henceforth leave all others and cleave to him only. Egypt and Assyria fall into the background ; their armies may be the means which Yahweh employs to discipline his people but it is by *his* dealing with them that they are brought to a better mind.

What was Hosea's decision for his own problem which ran parallel to this ? It was that he would put away his wife for a while that he might eventually receive her again for always. They must not continue to live together as man and wife—that would be to pretend that nothing had taken place ; nor would he divorce her, since his love remained in spite of her disloyalty. But if they were separated for a while, she might understand how much she had wronged him and be drawn to him again in penitence and fidelity.¹

This also is the sequel to Yahweh's dealing with his people, as Hosea foresees it taking shape in the future. That nomad tribe beyond Jordan which is all that is left of once so proud Israel will now be capable of returning to the promised land and taking up again the agricultural civilisation which perished in the recent disaster. They will do it this time with a clear apprehension of what distinguishes Yahweh from Baal, so that they will be under no temptation to surrender to the cults of the now desolate

¹ iii. 3.

high-places. Israel can be prosperous and happy without danger to the soul, because it has learned its lesson once for all. There will be a new and more enduring security in the land, as man's labour tames the wild beasts and drives them far from his home. There will be no need to restore the state-apparatus which has been swept away in the invasion, for with Yahweh as the defence of his people, what need will there be of armaments? Finally, Yahweh will recall his sentence of repudiation, and will accept those whom he once was compelled to disown. "I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God."¹

What is so remarkable in Hosea's message is that he retains in deliverance as in judgment the sense of distance between Yahweh and his people. It is because he is God and not man that he does not condone the iniquities of public life, the dissolution of family ties, and the immoral rites of the sanctuaries. But it is for just that reason also that he opens a door in the hour of Israel's sorest humiliation and brings the nation back where it had fallen before, in the conviction that this time it will stand fast. Whereas the popular religion presumed upon the tie which united Israel to Yahweh, and whereas Amos saw this tie severed outright by Yahweh's sovereign independence in righteousness, Hosea finds in Yahweh's character that which will restore the broken relation by disciplining wayward Israel in righteousness. It is wrong therefore to oppose him to his predecessor; if he represents an advance upon Amos, he only does so because he has incorporated the other's message in his own. Justice is still for him the principle of Yahweh's rule in history, but he has learned from his own experience that justice may be used as an instrument of mercy.

¹iii. 5 is hardly consistent with this and is probably a later addition; Hosea does not attach importance to the Davidic dynasty, and a Judahite redactor seems to have been at work elsewhere.

CHAPTER IV

ISAIAH

OF the spiritual experience of Isaiah we have a transcript from his own hand, though here also, as in the case of Hosea, what came out of it in the course of his life has been read back into it in the process of committing it to writing. For it is not possible to suppose that Isaiah set out on his mission with foreknowledge that it would serve only to increase the guilt of his hearers and that it was for this very purpose that Yahweh had called him. The name Shear-yashub which he gave to his son quite early in his career is evidence enough that, whereas Hosea came to a hope for his people in the second half of his ministry, Isaiah began with this. We must therefore suppose that this autobiographical passage was written down only late in life, when the prophet had sustained disappointment after disappointment and came to feel that nothing more had come of his appeals than to confirm the people in their obstinate rebellion. Like those who in the Early Church used his words to explain the rejection by the Jews of their Messiah, he could not conceive that this result had come about by a frustration of the divine purpose, he persuaded himself that it was meant, for ends of judgment and chastisement, that his labour should be in vain.

When now we turn to the inaugural vision itself, we can detect in it a number of factors of the utmost importance.¹ The setting, for example, is significant, for he to whom we are introduced is an urban prophet and one whose words will lend a peculiar value henceforth to the Temple in Jerusalem. It is here therefore that he meets with Yahweh or, rather, with the divine King, for the proper name does

¹ Isaiah vi.

not appear till later in the narrative. The divine sovereign is seen by him as a majestic presence which fills, yet transcends, the Temple. This shrine, the centre of Israel's worship, is far too small to contain him, though in some sense he is localised there. He whom men meet with in its courts is so great that when he sits upon his throne, only the skirt of his robe sweeps through the shrine. The opening sentence of the vision-story is accordingly paradoxical in character, for the splendour which lies far beyond our seeing is yet somehow bound to the Temple. The impression of his majesty is yet further enhanced by the description of the court which surrounds him, superhuman beings who veil themselves before his splendour even while they wait obedient for his slightest bidding. A further paradox is that the transcendent is also immanent; not the Temple only, but the whole earth, is filled with his glory. Yahweh—for the Sovereign is now named as Israel's God—is infinitely beyond us and yet intimately near to us.

The threefold use of the word "holy" is of course equivalent to our adjective "absolute": Yahweh is the absolutely holy one. It is not to be supposed that this is a new conception with Isaiah or that he was the first to associate ethical purity with the notion of holiness. Amos clearly has this in mind when he speaks of the immoral rites at the sanctuaries as profaning Yahweh's holy name,¹ and Hosea falls back on the divine holiness to express that wherein Yahweh is so different from man that he will hold back destruction in the name of mercy.² But Isaiah made central in his message an element which was peripheral in his predecessors and he made it central also for the religion of his people. Even though the Priestly Code might continue into the post-exilic period the ceremonial connotation of holiness, for the teachers of Israel this served only to provide them with a store-house of illustrations and symbols, holiness itself being essentially ethical.

¹ Amos ii. 7. ² Hosea xi. 9.

When the holiness of their Sovereign is proclaimed by the members of the divine court, an earthquake follows and smoke fills the building. In other words, the holiness of Yahweh is dread and awe-inspiring, it separates between him and man, it is something before which all things shrink abashed. The language used is highly suggestive of what Otto has taught us to call the "numinous," and it is in this sphere that we must locate holiness, as the union of transcendent majesty and ethical purity. Holiness has that in it which cannot be expressed in words, not even in such words as "goodness" and "righteousness"; there is a surplus of meaning which can be conveyed only by the tone of voice which is employed. At the revelation of Yahweh under this aspect Isaiah stands self-condemned, conscious of the gulf which separates him, a sinner, from such holiness. He suddenly becomes aware, and agonisingly aware, of a sin which is at once personal and social; if it has marred his own life, it has disfigured also that of his people, and he stands under any judgment which falls upon them. The sin is specified as that of the lips: it is falsehood and insincerity. In utter humility the prophet acknowledges himself one with his people in their estrangement from God; he begins, that is to say, not as one who stands over against them as Yahweh's spokesman, but as one who stands with them in their guilt before him.

At this point in the vision something happens which is reminiscent of Hosea: that by which the prophet was rebuked now reveals itself as that by which he is to be delivered. Holiness has a redemptive quality, and that in Yahweh from which the prophet shrank abashed now goes forth to him in forgiveness and redemption. His lips, which are the seat of his sin, are touched by a live coal from the altar charged with the divine holiness. By the contact Isaiah is purged and made fit to be the mouthpiece of Yahweh: as we should say, he has felt the touch of God upon his soul and become thereby another man.

What follows stamps Isaiah as unique among the prophets. While others came to their task under some form of divine constraint, doing that from which they would of themselves have shrunk, he is a volunteer in Yahweh's service. He is so near to the divine presence that he is introduced into the divine counsels ; there is a work to be done in the world and a man is needed to do it. It is as if Yahweh reflects for a moment before he makes his choice of a prophet, but before a conclusion is reached this man who a moment ago shrank back under the consciousness of sin now presses forward and offers himself. He will be the messenger of the King. " I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us ? Then I said, Here am I ; send me." Isaiah dared to accept the responsibility of prophecy in an hour when the political horizon was darkened by the advance of Assyria and when his two predecessors had made it clear that even the most hopeful word a prophet might be charged to speak would sound like doom in the ears of his people and might only be reached through his own heart's utter agony. If they are to be honoured who accepted such an office when it was thrust upon them, how much more is he to be esteemed who volunteered for it !

It was as a prophet of justice and doom that Isaiah appeared before his countrymen, and in the " Song of the Vineyard " he has given poignant expression to the sorrow that is in the heart of Yahweh.¹ Like Hosea, he dared to transfer to the divine mind our human experience of disappointment and frustration. Yahweh has lavished all possible care upon his people, in expectation that they would respond by righteousness : Isaiah does not argue that this, and not any outward show of devotion, is what he wants, he takes it for granted. But alas ! the response was not forthcoming and Yahweh cannot continue his protection of those who thus sin against the intention for which they

¹ v. 1-7.

became a nation. The vineyard will be abandoned to wild beasts and Israel left to the mercy of the nations about her.

In the passage which follows this, we can see what forms this basic unrighteousness of Israel assumed in Isaiah's day. In a series of woes the sins of the time are denounced and while some of them are already familiar to us others belong to a more sophisticated society than we have yet met with. The agrarian revolution, in Judah as in the North, has led to the formation of great estates by the purchase of small-holdings and the eviction of the peasantry who tilled them. In the cities an idle rich class has grown up which has no occupation except its own amusement and passes from one drinking-party to another. But alongside of these familiar phenomena we discern others. Here is the sceptic, for example, who has provided himself with an intellectual justification for conscienceless action ; if there is a God at all, he is indifferent to human affairs and can be relied upon to take no notice. Here also is the sophist, the man who plays fast and loose with moral distinctions and knows all the tricks of rhetoric by which to make the worse cause appear the better. Then there is the self-confident member of the intelligentsia who has nothing to learn, least of all from the ravings of a prophet. All these types are at home in an urban community and its educated class.¹

Against these, Isaiah declares, Yahweh will rise up in just such dismaying majesty as he revealed on that initial occasion in the Temple. Whatever instrumentality he may choose to employ, nothing must be allowed to blunt the impression of a direct and shattering impact of the divine upon the national and the human. It would seem as though in this early stage the prophet thought in terms of a theophany, a manifestation of Yahweh in might and judgment which brings to an end all human pride. The criticism of civilisation which is involved here goes much

¹ v. 8-24.

farther than Hosea's simple rejection of the monarchy and the state. Commerce is reprobated equally with armaments and idols ; the traders' pact is as much a human trust as the chariot, for it withdraws Israel from its union with Yahweh and attaches it instead to the neighbouring nations and their way of life. Like his predecessors, Isaiah looks back on the nomad period as one of fidelity and purity ; apostasy has come in with the civilisation of Canaan and with more complicated forms of society and their inevitable foreign commitments. As yet, it would seem, no invasion has broken the military strength of Israel, and towers and fortresses stand out against the sky, promising security to the population : when the whirlwind of judgment has passed over them, only so many heaps of ruins will be left. Perhaps also Judah was making a bid for naval power, and this too for Isaiah is a monstrous exhibition of human pride, and must therefore go the same way.¹

It may be as well to digress here and to consider what justification, if any, there was for this negative attitude to an advanced civilisation. To us, it is suggestive of Tolstoi and Gandhi ; the modern mind is convinced that the way to be taken lies not backward but forward through the problems of our complex society. But are there not certain features of Western civilisation which are viewed by many thoughtful people with grave disquiet ? Would we wish the world to be handed over entirely to the Hollywood film, the motor-car, large-scale industry, and the atomic bomb ? Do we not sometimes sigh for days when life was less frantic and our roads less beset with death ? Do not some of us dread the Americanisation of our country as much as the prophet dreaded any assimilation to Phœnician culture ? The difference between such a standpoint and that of Isaiah's is purely relative. We have come to accept as the essentials of civilised life what in his day were strange and questionable institutions, alien to the mind

¹ ii. 6-22.

of his people. But the gap between nomad habits and the beginnings of bureaucracy, trade, and foreign politics was comparable with that between a peaceful, democratic state and the modern totalitarian monster. In each case, conflict arises between tradition and new forms of social organisation.

"The lofty looks of¹ man shall be brought low, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."¹ Yahweh is for Isaiah the "wholly other," the one who asserts himself in the destruction of all human alternatives to his rule. The contrast between man's pride and Yahweh's glory was stamped upon the prophet's soul in his inaugural vision; it is an essential part of what he means by the divine holiness. Yahweh is throned in majesty apart from this earth and sinning men, and their pretensions can only maintain themselves as he refrains from challenging them. Once let him appear in glory and men will hide themselves from the terror of his appearance.

Isaiah, as we have seen, is an urban prophet and his background is the city of Jerusalem with its aristocracy, its merchant-princes, and its luxury-loving womenfolk. It is only natural therefore that, familiar as he was with a graded social organisation, he should conceive of doom as bringing with it the dissolution of any such hierarchy. In the day of judgment as he describes it society will be robbed at one blow of its leaders and will be exposed to the danger of chaos. In the upheaval which results mere lads will seize power and the people be handed over to their caprices. To be sure, frantic efforts will be made to restore something like order, but there will be a general flight from responsibility, so that any man who is hailed as leader will at once protest vehemently that he lacks the necessary qualifications for office.² What Isaiah envisages is nothing less than the total breakdown of organised society with its

¹ ii. 11. ² iii. 1-15.

inevitable accompaniments in human misery. The divine judgment will operate, here as in Hosea, for the destruction of all that had weaned Judah from its true allegiance and falsified its life.

Yet one question remains to be asked: how far does Isaiah think of this coming judgment as final and how far does he make it serve a remedial purpose?⁶ While it would seem as though, when doom was his theme, he spoke as if it admitted of no modification, there is evidence enough that he was not without hope for his people. It would seem indeed that some of the oracles of a more optimistic character have been lost, since the name Shear-yashub which he gave to his son was presumably accompanied by some pronouncement which has not come down to us. The fact that a child was so named as to suggest the survival of a remnant after judgment implies that this expectation occupied a larger place in Isaiah's teaching at the time than our texts would lead us to suppose.

The doctrine of the remnant does but give a name and a clear outline to Hosea's hope for the Northern Kingdom in its experience of chastisement. As we have seen, Isaiah in his turn anticipates that the social order will break up in chaos, that armaments will go the way of idols, and that the elaborate hierarchy of Jerusalem will disappear amid a general confusion. In the crisis of 735, as we shall see, Isaiah envisages the collapse of agriculture in Judah and reversion to nomad conditions. In all this he is but transferring to the South what Hosea forecast for the North. Reduced to the dimensions of a nomad tribe, Judah will yet survive disaster and under Yahweh's guidance will begin again.¹ If sometimes Isaiah uses the language of denunciation and doom without qualification, that must be set down to the impressionism which is characteristic of the Hebrew mind: one idea is dominant for the time being, till its place is taken by another which is

¹ vii. 18-25.

equally exclusive, and no effort is made to adjust the two.

With this possibility before the prophet's mind judgment comes to have for him the value of purification. He denounces the vices of Jerusalem, with its venal law-courts, its oppression of the poor, and its general moral decay. Yahweh will therefore act to avenge himself on those who thus do despite to his holiness and will pass city and people through the furnace of affliction, till they emerge therefrom a community pledged to the justice and fidelity which have long since become forgotten virtues. "I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning : afterward shalt thou be called The city of righteousness, the faithful city."¹ It is to be noted that Isaiah does not regard urban life as beyond redemption, he can visualise it as consecrated to Yahweh's service and enlisted in the cause of justice. Here, as Procksch remarks, we come upon a difference between Isaiah and Hosea ; while the latter looks for the "withering of the state," the former conceives of the future under a political form.²

In the year 735 the prophet Isaiah found himself called upon to play a leading part in the affairs of his country.

The facts are easily accessible, so that we can be content here with the barest summary. In revolt against Assyria, Israel and Syria combined to force Ahaz of Judah to abandon his neutrality and join their coalition : should he himself prove recalcitrant, they had a puppet-ruler ready to mount the throne in his place. They were possessed of what seemed overwhelming force and Ahaz hastily prepared his capital to stand a siege, though with but little hope of success. At this juncture and amid the general panic Isaiah is bidden go to meet Ahab as he is inspecting the defences, and to take with him his son Shear-yashub, Remnant-shall-return.³ It is clear that the lad's name is to serve as text to the discourse which Isaiah is commissioned to deliver to the King. That is to say, the ultimate security

¹ i. 21ff.

² Procksch : *Isaia* I, 48.

³ vii. 3ff.

of Judah lies, so the prophet is to insist, not in any fortifications improvised at this moment but in the gracious will of Yahweh to preserve his people even through their sorest peril and his own severest chastisement.

We must assume that name and message alike are already familiar to the king, though this means, as has already been said, that the relevant oracles from Isaiah's earliest period have been lost. But Isaiah does not simply apply an old conception to a new situation, for that might carry with it no more than a promise that *some* in Judah would survive, even after the defeat of the nation and the fall of the capital. The offer to Ahaz is couched in much more generous terms. The remnant is now identified in fact, if not in name, with the nation of Judah. Presumably Isaiah is able to take so momentous a step because he does not discern in the Syro-Ephraimite coalition the authentic features of a divine judgment. Fearful as the crisis is, it is not the expected theophany; not yet does Yahweh arise in majesty to humble the pride of men and lay all fortresses low. The armies of the North are not the instruments he has chosen, and therefore they will fail of their purpose.

Here is something new and momentous in genuine prophecy, nothing less than a guarantee of the existence of the empirical nation—but on conditions. Isaiah is as conscious as his predecessors of the distance between Yahweh and the nation, and the pledge of security which he is authorised to make is dependent on the return of the nation there and then to a right relation to Yahweh. Here is the doctrine of return, of repentance, in the grand style. However much Judah has sinned against Yahweh in the past, she can use this crisis as an opportunity to return to him, and to renewed loyalty he will respond with protection. "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."¹ The converse is equally true, that nothing can shake those who have committed themselves wholly to Yahweh.

¹ vii. 9.

But the translation is inadequate to the original, in which "to believe" and "to be established" represent two forms of the same verb. To commit oneself to God is to win security both inwardly as peace of mind and outwardly as deliverance from peril.

The contrast between the divine and the human that we have met previously in Isaiah's oracles occurs also here. "The head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin. The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son."¹ The argument breaks off at this point, but the hearers could not fail to complete it: "The head of Judah is Jerusalem, and the head of Jerusalem is—not Ahaz, but Yahweh!" Each of the opposing parties has its champion; theirs is human, ours divine. The implications of this position are far-reaching in the extreme. For Isaiah Judah is not a state over against other states, but a community of a religious order and therefore different from its neighbours. As it is willing to be other than they are in its policies, so it can hope to avoid their fate. The demand which the prophet makes upon the nation is that it should die as a state and be reborn as a religious society, pledged to Yahweh's service and therefore under his protecting care. If Judah responds to this appeal, it will become the remnant which is spared disaster, whereas what Isaiah had looked for hitherto had been only a remnant which would emerge from disaster. Has any other man dared to ask as much from his nation as Isaiah did, and that too in its hour of mortal danger? That he was conscious of the magnitude of his demand is clear from the fact that he was prepared to authenticate it by any sign for which Ahaz cared to ask. So certain was he that Yahweh was in the counsel he gave that he did not doubt that he would support it in any way that was needed.

But Ahaz made no request: his mind was made up and

¹ vii. 8f. Omit "and within threescore & five years, &c.", as a gloss. So remote a deliverance would have yielded little encouragement.

a miracle would have been awkward indeed, for it would have forced him to reconsider what he had resolved upon. He proposed to set Assyria in movement against his enemies. That to Isaiah was base and cowardly defection, it was to trust in the machinery of the state rather than in God, to link the people of Yahweh with a heathen power because one did not believe that he could¹ give security. But the promise of deliverance stands, if only men will respond to it, and the prophet hastens to assure the king that Yahweh's will to defend his people remains unshaken and that not all will turn away in unbelief. "Yahweh himself shall give you a sign ; behold a young woman is pregnant and shall bear a son, and shall call his name God-with-us."¹ The sign is one of assurance and rebuke at the same time. The faith of which Ahaz is incapable will be found in one of the common people ; a young mother will front the menace from the North without flinching and, heedless of the panic around her, will name her child from the deliverance she confidently anticipates. When Ahaz hears of this, he will know that there are braver hearts in Judah than his own and will learn from the fulfilment of the sign that Yahweh's word stands fast. Already there is beginning to take shape in the prophet's mind a new conception, that of the individual believer whose trust in God contrasts sharply with the defection of the nation as a whole and its rulers.²

Ahaz was deaf to any such appeal, however, and called on Assyria for assistance. When it became clear that this was his policy and that the armies were on the march against Damascus and Samaria, a new picture of the future rose before Isaiah's eyes. He had already declared that Yahweh was more to be feared than any league of hostile countries and that to reject his offer of deliverance would be to invite disaster.³ He now sees that disaster taking shape : the forces of the Assyrian world-empire, once set in motion,

¹ vii. 14. ² See Additional Note., p. 75. ³ viii. 11-15.

will not stop at their immediate objectives. True, they will storm and sack the capitals of the enemy, but they will not turn back at the frontiers of Judah. That is not the way of imperial powers. Like a flood, Assyria will sweep on and over the land; like a plague of insects it will settle on every living thing; like a knife in a man's hand, it will clip and shear till nothing remains whole. In that day of calamity, the land will go out of cultivation and Judah will revert to nomad conditions—we observe again the close parallel to Hosea ii. Freed from one menace, Judah will be exposed to another still more severe, since this time it is not only the legions of Assyria that march against it, but Yahweh himself will be the enemy.¹

What of the remnant in this new situation which is to come about by Ahaz's rejection of the prophet's call to faith and promise of security? We might expect that Isaiah would go back to his earlier teaching and hold out the hope that even Assyrian invasion would be used for purposes of discipline, so that the reduced population which it would leave behind would have learned its lesson and be capable of forming the nucleus of a restored nation, doing Yahweh's will in right dealing between man and man. But, as we have seen, there is a flexibility in Isaiah's thinking which enables him to meet new situations and find a revelation of God in them which he had not known before. And that is the case here. The word "faith," once spoken, has transformed the whole picture of the future and gives to the conception of the remnant a new shape, though perhaps Isaiah was not himself fully aware of what was taking place.

While the policy he advocated was rejected by the king with, we can scarcely doubt, the backing of the mass of the people, there were those who showed themselves responsive to it. The decisive step had been taken, the Assyrians were on the march, Isaiah had made his protest and been

¹ viii., 5-8a; vii. 17-25.

unheeded. What now should he do? It came to him that he must commit his oracles on the Syro-Ephraimite peril to writing and entrust them to the small group which had gathered round him, as a band of disciples about their master. He, his children, and they formed together a believing community, choosing what they saw to be the will of God even when their nation rejected it. As such, they would wait quietly on the issue of events; Yahweh had withdrawn for the time being from Judah and left it to its fate, but that could not be his final intention, and these faithful souls would await in patience the fuller disclosure of his purpose. Meantime, the children to whom Isaiah had given prophetic names would witness to the divine succour which had been offered and rejected. And through it all, Yahweh himself would dwell enthroned on the Temple-hill.¹ What does this mean? It means that the remnant has begun to exist, not as those who survive disaster, but as the few who gather around the prophet in faith when the rest of their people reject him. *The remnant is here already as the believing community within the nation.*

We need not suppose that the new conception entirely displaced the old one in Isaiah's mind: probably he still anticipated that the judgment exercised through Assyria would be used to preserve and purify the nucleus of a better nation. The larger vision of God's purpose must at first exist alongside of the narrower, but it is with it that the future lies. Yet something wonderful and revolutionary enters history at this point: the nation, alienated from Yahweh by social corruption and want of faith, is re-united to him, not as a political community, but in the persons of those who group themselves in loyalty around his messenger and commit the future and their vindication to him.

With the appeal of Ahaz to Tiglath-pileser, Judah became

¹ viii. 16-18.

a vassal-state of the Assyrian empire. Isaiah's expectation of invasion was not fulfilled ; there was no need for the Assyrians to cross the frontier, as their strength was such that a mere demand for tribute was enough. Henceforth Judah became subject to a foreign overlord. The second crisis in Isaiah's life is connected with an unsuccessful attempt to throw off the galling yoke. The prophet seems by this time to have secured a position of influence in Jerusalem and to be in constant touch with court-circles. He was aware of the incessant intrigues with neighbouring states which were equally resentful of Assyrian rule and of the arrival of messengers from Egypt for the express purpose of stimulating revolt. An abortive attempt was made in the ninth year of Sargon (711 B.C.) and Isaiah appears before us as lodging his protest against rebellion and by an acted parable demonstrating its folly.¹ The rising seems to have been suppressed without great difficulty and Hezekiah was able to make peace with his overlord in Nineveh. But dissatisfaction continued to smoulder and it broke out into flame with the death of Sargon and the accession of Sennacherib. Merodach-baladan of Babylon was the prime mover in this instance and he planned by allying himself with the states of the Mediterranean seaboard and the Nile to compel Sennacherib to fight on two fronts. But he was defeated before the revolt was ripe in the West. Meanwhile Isaiah was insistent in his protests against rebellion and his ridicule of reliance upon Egypt ; that power was notorious for using others to pull its chestnuts from the fire and had no intention of getting its fingers burnt.

The anti-Egyptian tirades of Isaiah are not based on any political calculations but are specifically religious in origin. The contrast between the divine and the human is again the governing consideration with him. Trust in arms and chariots is opposed to trust in Yahweh : Isaiah would have

¹ xx.

taken seriously those words which we so often sing without meaning them :

Sufficient is thine arm alone,
And our defence is sure.

Reliance on military weapons will bring its own retribution, so that those who are now confident of the forces they can put in the field will one day find themselves fugitives before much more powerful forces. The one counsel of safety for Judah is to contract out of power-politics entirely and to put her trust in supernatural assistance. Here again faith is the source of security : " In returning and rest shall ye be saved ; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength."¹ Let Judah remain neutral and refuse to be drawn into conflicts between the great powers ; and let this be done, not out of cowardice, but because it is in the world for other ends than theirs. Nor need it fear the consequences of such a policy, for it has a might at its disposal which surpasses all that Egypt is able to offer. " The Egyptians are men, and not god ; and their horses flesh, and not spirit."²

We do not know what Isaiah's political opponents had to say, but we can easily imagine what they might have said. The weakness of his proposal was that in actual fact not to rely on Egypt was to rely on Assyria, and were not the Assyrians also men, and were not their horses also flesh ? What the prophet advocated as faith in God became, once it was translated into the language of political realities, submission to Assyria. It was not neutrality, but support of the other side, not humble reliance on Yahweh but forced contribution to the military power of Nineveh. Was it not the better part for Judah to strike boldly for its freedom ? Could it not best fulfil the tasks Yahweh had assigned to it as it stood independent among the nations of the world acknowledging him alone as its Lord ? Nor was the theology behind the prophet's advice beyond dispute. Granted that

¹ xxx. 15-17. ² xxi. 3.

Yahweh was Judah's sure protector, did he not act through men of courage and determination? Had he not raised up a Moses to deliver their fathers from Egypt and a Saul to beat back the Philistine invasion? Was the situation now as hopeless as it seemed to be then? Why should not Yahweh act as he did in those days? Nor need Isaiah's strictures upon urban civilisation be taken seriously. For was not Yahweh's best gift to his people king David who made Jerusalem his capital and organised the twelve tribes, not merely as a nation, but as a state?

We may imagine that such were the questions debated in Jerusalem between the pro-Egyptian and the pro-Assyrian parties at the court. In the event, the former carried the day and tribute was refused. Sennacherib, having disposed of the threat in the West, began his campaign in the East. So we come to the fateful year 701 and the threat to Jerusalem. Any reconstruction of what happened is complicated by the fact that the accounts which have come down to us are so divergent. They fall into two groups: (a) i. Sennacherib's own version of events as preserved for us by the Taylor prism: ii. the annalist account in 2 Kings xviii. 13-16: (b) i. the Isaiah-legend in 2 Kings xviii. 17ff. according to which Jerusalem is threatened by Sennacherib's delegates in person: ii. the Isaiah-legend which begins at 2 Kings xix. 9b and in which a letter conveys Sennacherib's demands upon Hezekiah. It is significant that there is close agreement between the two (a) narratives, and also that the book of Isaiah contains only the (b) stories. These facts make one suspect at the outset that the Isaiah-legends are of less historical value than the other two accounts and that what actually happened was much less creditable to Hezekiah than has actually been thought.

It has been supposed that after Hezekiah had tendered his submission and paid up the arrears of tribute, for some reason—perhaps because Tirhakah's army had appeared

on the Egyptian frontier—Sennacherib decided to make further demands and to reduce Jerusalem by siege if these were refused. It was on this occasion that his army was reduced to impotence and compelled to withdraw, leaving the capital untouched, as Isaiah had promised it would be. But this is to force into agreement two strands of narrative which are quite different in origin and purpose, while it does not account either for the inclusion in 2 Kings of a narrative of humiliating submission when the campaign actually ended victoriously or for the fact that Hezekiah for the rest of his reign and the kings of Judah to Josiah were vassals of Assyria. At the same time, Sennacherib does not claim to have occupied Jerusalem and we may therefore safely conclude that the Biblical writers are correct in their assertion that the city was never taken.

How then are the events of 701 in Palestine to be reconstructed? We may suppose that Sennacherib, having established his headquarters at Lachish, sent a dispatch to Hezekiah demanding instant surrender and backed it up with a contingent from his army. The situation of 735 had returned and the panic in the capital was comparable with that which had marked the former occasion. Again, Isaiah came forward with his appeal for faith and his promise of divine assistance. He identified the capital with the remnant whose survival was assured: Sennacherib had devastated the countryside, reduced the fortified towns, and depopulated whole areas. "The daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a garden."¹ But she is still the daughter of Zion. In other words, Jerusalem is the city of the Temple in which Yahweh has in some sense his abode and as such he will preserve it against the foe. "Out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and out of mount Zion they that shall escape: the zeal of Yahweh of hosts shall perform this." Therefore Hezekiah need not fear;

¹ i. 7-9.

the invaders would cast up no mount against his city, shoot no arrow against it.¹

But Hezekiah was no hero of faith and he shrank from such a venture as that to which the prophet called. He hesitated, feared, and capitulated, abandoning his allies and paying a heavy indemnity. Negotiations for surrender had been completed, when Sennacherib withdrew, perhaps because of a pestilence which had broken out in his army on the frontier of Egypt, instructing Hezekiah to send the captives and the tribute *after him to Nineveh*. This last point is of decisive significance, since if Hezekiah could not find courage to revolt when the Assyrian army had withdrawn, how can we suppose that he would refuse submission when it was at his gates? The submission was complete and Hezekiah was quite convinced of his inability to resist so powerful a foe. He remained for the rest of his life the faithful vassal of Nineveh, though with territory reduced to little more than the capital and the country in its immediate neighbourhood.

We can understand, however, what the reaction was among Isaiah's followers when news arrived of the Assyrian withdrawal. If only Hezekiah had listened to the prophet, he would have been spared this humiliation! Yahweh had kept his word and had intervened to defend mount Zion. In the telling of this story subsequently, while the official annalist recorded only the surrender and made no mention of an Isaiah, the disciples of the latter made of him the saviour of his country. The withdrawal of Sennacherib was ascribed to Yahweh's intervention and Hezekiah was made to turn to Isaiah for advice in his hour of peril. The relation which the narrators would have liked to see established between king and prophet is read back into a very different state of affairs, and all mention of the surrender is quietly dropped. What we have in the (b) narratives is therefore legend and not history, and

¹ xxxvii. 32-35.

while they do preserve some reminiscences of what happened, they must not be allowed to blind us to what was the conclusion of the campaign—Sennacherib established his suzerainty over Judah so firmly that even when his army had withdrawn Hezekiah sent hostages and tribute after him to Nineveh.¹

Let us be clear what this means. The impregnable Jerusalem of 701, defended by a prophet's bold faith against the heathen aggressor, is legend and not history. It is good that it should be so, for the legend has had a disastrous outcome in the superstitious identification of God's cause in the world with the survival of Jerusalem and its Temple. The greatness of Isaiah lies elsewhere than in any such miracle. His greatness lies in the new turn he gave to the doctrine of the remnant. Following in the steps of Hosea, he thought of the remnant to the end as a community of those who survive the coming tribulation and are schooled by suffering to better things. But there was a time, as we have seen, when he gathered around himself a group of persons who could not go the way of their nation, whose ultimate loyalty was given to Yahweh even against Judah and who abandoned all earthly securities for that which comes by faith. In other words, without fully understanding what he was doing, *he created the remnant as a fellowship of faith.*

¹ So Procksch : *Jesaja* I, 8ff.

ADDITIONAL NOTE—IMMANUEL

The passages which require to be considered in any discussion of the Immanuel-prophecy are the following :

(a) Isaiah vii. 14-16 ; viii. 5-10.

(b) ix. 2-7 ; xi. 1-9 ; xlii. 1-8.

In the (a) passages the name "Immanuel" is used, while in the (b) passages it is often assumed that he is referred to. It is just this assumption which I would challenge.

Gressmann,¹ for example, holds that the original prophecy of Immanuel's birth derived its force from centuries of popular tradition and expectation, from an eschatological hope which was common to the nations of the Near East. It is the divine child of this expectation who is to be born in the prophet's own day, and the promise, while it offers relief to the hard-pressed nation of Judah, threatens Ahaz with punishment for his unbelief. For the appearance of the child-Messiah will carry with it the deposition of Ahaz. "Once the Messiah ascends the throne, the reigning monarch must abdicate." In the section viii. 5-10 Judah is under the protection of Immanuel and is guaranteed by him against the coming peril. "The Messiah Immanuel is the guarantee that the onset of the nations will be broken when it reaches Jerusalem ; not that he will himself destroy the nations, Yahweh will intervene on his behalf." In the (b) sections the attributes and career of the divine child are described in greater detail.

Attractive as this reconstruction is at first glance, it is open to certain objections. Gressmann would understand by the "butter and honey" of vii. 15 the mythical food of Paradise : it is more probably inserted here as a gloss based on 16 and 22. In the second passage of the (a) group, a very slight emendation in 8—"for God is with us" instead of "O Immanuel"—seems to be called for to bring this verse into line with 10. In that case, 8b² will not represent the conclusion of the immediately preceding oracle but that of a strophe now lost to us which originally ran parallel to 9f. Thus the harsh change of metaphor in 8 is avoided, and while the flood denotes invasion the wings symbolise, much more naturally, deliverance. 5-8a and 8b-10

¹ *Der Messias* (1929), 235ff.

² i.e., "The stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of the land, for God is with us."

will then be quite distinct poems and from different periods in the prophet's life. That being so, the name Immanuel will drop out and be replaced by the slogan "God with us!" There is no Messianic deliverer in 8b-10, but Yahweh himself acts.

To return now to the original oracle in vii. 14-16, one may accept Gressmann's suggestion that the relation of the prophets to the popular hope was positive as well as negative, while doubting whether this is the place at which to make use of it. His exposition seems to take a great deal for granted, and it is surprising that what is virtually—on his view—sentence of deposition on the reigning monarch should be left to be inferred from the oracle and should apparently leave no further mark on the prophet's work. As regards the (*b*) passages, there is nothing in any of them to imply that the child of vii. 14-16 is alluded to, and it is remarkable, if Gressmann's position is correct, that nothing is said of how Ahaz is to be disposed of before he can rule, since he is to sit "upon the throne of David."

It is simplest therefore to recognise that the (*a*) and (*b*) passages are concerned with two quite different things. Once that is accepted, it is possible to see what should in any case have been clear, that in the original prophecy *interest centres, not round the child, but round the mother*. The sign is not in his birth but in her faith. The expression "God with us!" is for Isaiah the basic confession of faith in divine protection, come what may come. The mother utters it as her child is born and he himself works it into his song of defiance and trust (viii. 8b-10). Isaiah bids the king meet his enemies with quiet confidence, and when he cannot do so, assures him that among the common people there will be a faith that shames him. The Messianic idea must not be introduced at this stage.

CHAPTER V

JEREMIAH

IN the story of Jeremiah's call to prophesy, a more personal note is struck than is the case with his predecessors. He is not overborne by some divine revelation but won and persuaded in intimate intercourse between him and his God. His mission as prophet seems to him to grow out of his whole life hitherto, he has the consciousness of having been born for this very thing, he has never known a moment when Yahweh did not lay claim to his life and what is now happening is the consummation of all this. Yet there is that in him which is reluctant to accept even so clearly-marked a vocation and would defer, if not reject, it. He is too young, why can he not be allowed to wait till he is more mature in mind and better able to meet the opposition which he foresees? There is a shrinking from the tasks of life here which has its parallel in the story of Moses.¹ We may say that there is a struggle in the soul of Jeremiah between the sense of personal inadequacy and the apprehension of God's will for him. All this is very human and brings him at the outset nearer to us than many others among the great figures of the Old Testament.

Nor is it surprising that he is reluctant when we realise that he is called to be "a prophet unto the nations." There is no need to question this, for none could interpret the nation's destiny in those days except as he set it in a world-context. Old empires were breaking up beneath the impact of new aspirants to power and there could be no will of Yahweh for his people which did not take cognisance of that fact. Jeremiah therefore felt himself called to work on a larger scale than his predecessors and

¹ Exodus iv. 10.

to stand on behalf of the Lord of history before the nations of the world. Nor was his calling only to the spoken word as we understand it : for him, the prophet's message was a deed and a weapon. He was to be Yahweh's vicegerent among men : " See, I have this day set thee over the nations, and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow ; to build, and to plant."¹ The oracle of the prophet, that is to say, does not merely announce what is about to take place, it actually helps to bring it to pass. In his word Yahweh's action begins ; he fires, as it were, the train of destiny. And he who was called to such a position of eminence and responsibility was a timid, sensitive soul, averse from publicity and passionately attached to the people whose doom he must pronounce. The inner conflict which ensues upon this understanding of his mission is resolved by faith ; he who has called him will empower him and the word he must speak is not his own but Yahweh's.

Not that all his doubts are dispelled by this decision : they linger on in an appreciation of the risk to which he will expose himself. His whole personality will be at stake in what he is to attempt : will his courage fail him in the hour of trial and he prove himself unworthy of his calling ? " Be not dismayed at them, lest I dismay thee before them."² A failure of nerve at the crisis is what he dreads most, that his natural timidity should get the better of him and the opposition of his fellows induce him to betray his mission. What would happen then he knows, he would fall from the hands of Yahweh, a useless instrument. But no ! that need not and must not be, for he who called him to his service will make him equal to what he demands. His strength is not in himself but in God whom he obeys ; trusting in him, the sensitive soul will become a fortress against which all opposition will dash itself in vain. So he girds himself for his life-work, realising in advance what will befall him

¹ i. 10² i. 17.

but prepared to meet it : " They shall fight against thee ; but they shall not prevail against thee ; for I am with thee, saith Yahweh, to deliver thee."¹

This unveiling of the inner life is one of the distinctive features of Jeremiah's career and we shall find in it the clue to the understanding of his work. He has left us, embedded in his oracles, precious fragments of confession, prayer, and entreaty, so that we see how this man's natural hesitations were continually being overcome by a strength from beyond himself. If at times he faltered in the hour of trial only the God who sees in secret was aware of that, and the severity with which God spoke to him on these occasions was dictated by love ; this man was his chosen instrument and for his own sake and the world's must not be allowed to abandon his task. If once he begged to be released from the vocation which isolated him from his fellows and the joys of their common life, if for one awful moment he questioned even his most sacred experiences, as though what he took to be the voice of God had been only a trick of his own mind, he learned then to look within and not without, to use this trial for purposes of self-discipline and to make himself a less unworthy servant of God who had called him.² If again his own problem expanded into a general human one and the divine government of the world became questionable in his eyes, the inner voice bade him dismiss all peevish complaining and gird himself for duties and trials which would make his present ones shrink into insignificance.³ In such hours as these he won for himself something which he was meant to share subsequently with his fellows, and he left the spiritual life of his people permanently enriched because such an one as Jeremiah had been among them.

For the purpose of this study, we need not linger over the remaining features of Jeremiah's inaugural vision. At this stage he was a simple prophet of doom, not in any way to be

¹ i. 19. ² xv. 19-21 ; ³ xiii. 1-6.

distinguished from those who went before him. For our study of the prophet as a man torn between two loyalties, to God and to the nation, we must begin with the dramatic events of 621 B.C. and Jeremiah's relation to these.

The discovery of the roll in the Temple opened a fresh chapter in the history of Judah and provided the possibility of a new basis on which the relation between Yahweh and the nation might be re-established. In his goodness he had given to his people a new opportunity, making his will known more clearly and explicitly than ever before ; at the same time, there was found on the throne of Judah a true son of David, a king who could lead his people to the recognition of that will and obedience to it. Hence, on a day of national assembly, the whole people bound itself in a solemn covenant to reorder its life in public and private in accordance with the requirements of the newly-discovered law. On behalf of the assembled multitude the king pledged himself "to walk after Yahweh, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and all his soul . . . and all the people stood to the covenant."¹ It was a day of national renewal and rebirth, Judah becoming once again the people of Yahweh and putting itself under his protection. This was what Isaiah had hoped for but was not able to achieve ; Judah was now a community of faith and obedience.

It is highly significant that Jeremiah is the first prophet to make use of the covenant between Yahweh and his people as a basic religious concept. The explanation may well be that not until Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah, had cleared it of any suggestion of favouritism and privilege divorced from responsibility could this idea be accepted and worked with. There is surely some connection between this fact and the events of Jeremiah's early career ; the covenant was associated in his mind with a drastic reformation of religion, the abolition of high-places, and the elimination

¹ 2 Kings xxiii. 3.

from the capital of every vestige of those foreign cults which had come in as what we should call to-day the ideological accompaniment of Assyrian supremacy. So Jeremiah seems to have taken an active part in the propaganda which was required if Josiah's reforms were to win the consent of the masses. Such indeed is the natural interpretation of xi. 1-8, and no importance need be attached to the fact that the covenant in this passage is spoken of as made with the fathers at the Exodus while Deuteronomy purports to be a sermon delivered by Moses in the plain of Moab. For the latter explicitly appeals to an earlier covenant concluded at Horeb,¹ and the mention in the passage from Jeremiah of the departure from Egypt may have only a very general reference. Again, the murderous hostility which Jeremiah undoubtedly incurred at the hands of his own townsmen and kinsfolk would be best explained if we suppose that by his championship of the reforms he had set himself against their interests—and incidentally his own—as custodians of the local sanctuary at Anathoth.²

We may take it therefore that he hoped the best from this movement which had the backing of the king and was ready to work with it, at whatever risk to himself. He discerned in the circumstances of 621 a divine call to help in leading the nation back to a right relationship with Yahweh. But events were to force him to reconsider that judgment.

Josiah perished in battle, and the Egyptian victor deposed his successor, appointing Jehoiakim in his place. The new king was evidently as acceptable to his overlord as he was unacceptable to the people, and we may assume that he was notorious, even before his accession, for his pro-Egyptian sympathies. With the political aspect of his reign, however, we are not here concerned, nor with the difficult question of the extent to which the work of Josiah was undone in his time. For it is what survived

¹ e.g., Deut. v. 2.

² xi. 21., xii. 6.

of the reforms which Jeremiah singled out for censure at his most remarkable public appearance during this reign.

His sermon in the Temple has come down to us in two forms, but even the longer of these will hardly be more than an abridgement of the original utterance.¹ Jeremiah is to be imagined as addressing the crowd which throngs the Temple-court on the occasion of one of the annual festivals, a crowd in which the reforms of Josiah have served only to reinstate the popular religion as Amos had attacked it. The Temple has become an unconditional guarantee of the bond uniting Yahweh and his people, the reorganisation of religion has not brought with it the reformation that was hoped for, but has accomplished little more than the transfer to Jerusalem of the moral indifference and false trust that had so long been associated with the local sanctuaries. What gain was it that sacrifice could only be offered in the Temple, when sacrifice continued to be thought of as a bribe to enable a man to compound with Yahweh for his exploitation of his weaker fellows? Was it not clear now that the whole sacrificial system was an alien element in the religion of Israel, which at the outset was simply and sternly ethical and must become so again if the doom of Shiloh was not to be repeated in the ruin of the Temple?

So Jeremiah walked among his fellow-countrymen, a prophet of woe like those who had gone before him. The old abuses reappeared at a new level and the old sentence against them had therefore to be pronounced afresh. It is characteristic of him that he reinforces word by action, and by means of acted parables dramatises before the eyes of his contemporaries the coming calamity. To be sure, Isaiah had already employed such means of lending additional force to his message, but the symbolic action is utilised by Jeremiah on a much larger scale. As we have seen already, what we should call a sign is with the prophet

¹ vii. 1-15, 21-26; xxvi. 6.

more than that, it is a deed, and a deed of Yahweh himself through his agency. There is a potency, for example, about the shattering of the earthen jar before the city council of Jerusalem which must have left upon those who beheld it an impression of awe which we cannot easily recapture : in so far as they accepted the prophet as genuinely sent by Yahweh, they went away with the consciousness that his sentence of judgment was already being carried out.¹ It is not always possible to place the other actions of this kind in Jeremiah's career, and in our text there is a curious misdating of the most important of them—the wearing of the yoke—so that it is ascribed both to the reign of Jehoiakim and to that of Zedekiah, whereas it clearly belongs to the latter and to his abortive attempt to free himself from Babylonian supremacy.²

It is in the earlier period, however, that we must place the incident in which the Rechabites figure and which is designed to contrast the infidelity of Judah to its covenant obligations with the loyal adherence of these clansmen to the will of their ancestor. There is in addition an intrinsic appropriateness in the choice of the Rechabites for this purpose. For they continued the nomad protest against agriculture and its fertility-rites long after the rest of the nation had accepted urban life and the organisation of the state. Jeremiah's protest is in favour of the simpler ways of life whose memory is preserved in tradition and in the practice of a few small groups which have not surrendered ethical and spiritual values to so-called progress in civilisation. The bond uniting Yahweh and the nation has been severed by the action of the latter, choosing another allegiance instead of that which it had pledged to him, and Yahweh must acknowledge the severance as final. Yet, be it noted, the faithful will not suffer with the faithless, for the Rechabites' obedience will be rewarded by their pre-

¹ xix. 1-13. ² xxvii. 1, xxviii. 1.

servation : "Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever."¹

But Jeremiah was called not only to act out these signs before the people, but also to be in his own person just such a portent of things to come. How he must have suffered inwardly when the full extent of the isolation to which he was called became clear to him ! He was to live without wife or child, he who needed more than most men the support of affection and the family. Equally he was to remain apart from his fellows in their joys and sorrows, neither entering into the house of mourning nor taking part in wedding festivities. He must live an inhuman, unsocial life, as one who had no sympathy with his fellows, though all the while he was longing to identify himself with them and to be understood by them. Day by day he would be haunted by the knowledge that all this was meant to symbolize before his people their coming woes. Better that children should not be born than that they should grow up for the day of slaughter which would be their last ! Why mourn for any when the day was coming when so many would perish and so few would survive that the last rites would perforce be neglected ? Let the bridal song be silenced, too, for the time was not far distant when the only bond joining man and woman would be a common despair ! As Jeremiah went about among his fellows, so strangely and so unwillingly sundered from them, he would be a living threat of doom, warning men to expect before long the breakdown of the social order in some vast and terrible calamity.²

The prophet therefore was himself of the utmost significance for his message : that is true of Jeremiah as it was not of his predecessors. Of them all, Hosea stood nearest to him, for each of these two felt the strained relationship between Yahweh and his people as an agony in his own soul. Jeremiah was called to stand, now on the one side of that

¹ xxxv.

² xvi. '1-13.

relation, now on the other : sometimes he pleaded for his people with a passionate entreaty which would not accept refusal, and sometimes he accepted the divine judgment upon them as the only one possible. Despairing of the common people, he turned to the leaders, only to find that these were equally involved in the general corruption.¹ He saw in vision the advancing armies that were to storm and sack the capital, and even called them to begin their assault.² But then again his heart broke for the fate of his people, and he wished himself a fountain of penitential tears that he might atone for their sin and avert their doom.³ More than once it was borne in upon him that all hope was vain, that it was useless even to intercede for a nation so steeped in sin and so set upon folly. "Pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them : for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble."⁴ It seemed to him that evil was by now so ingrained in the people, had become so truly second nature, that no return to better things was to be looked for.⁵ Yet how could he give them up ? If they would not repent, he could do so on their behalf and renew in their stead vows of loyalty. "We acknowledge, O Yahweh, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers : for we have sinned against thee."⁶ But alas ! it was the prophet alone who spoke, and his words aroused no echo among his hearers.

He took over from Hosea and Isaiah the thought of the judgment as a process of purification : surely there was hope in that ! But there was none. For he knew that his mission was to sift and test his people : the word of the prophet, rather than the coming calamity, was to be the instrument of purification. So he bent himself to his task like one of those silversmiths he had so often watched. He plied the bellows, the fire leaped up, the dross was

¹ v. 1-9. ² vi. 1-8. ³ ix. 1. ⁴ xi. 14. ⁵ xiii. 23.

⁶ xiv. 19-22.

consumed. He peered into the crucible for the precious grains of silver that would be left behind—but there was nothing to be seen! It was all worthless metal!¹ For the time being at any rate Jeremiah has abandoned the hope which his predecessors won: there can be no remnant after all.

That however was not his considered judgment. In his darkest hours, there were still two grounds of hope left. Of one of them he was aware, of the other he could not be.

In the year 597 judgment fell upon the land. True, the principal offender was fortunate in his death: Jehoiakim, after first accepting and then repudiating the authority of Babylon, died before Nebuchadnezzar had completed his preparations for the siege. His young son Jehoiachin was left to make what terms he could with his overlord and was wise enough to surrender the city without resistance. He and the élite of the nation were deported to Babylon and Zedekiah was placed on the throne of a Judah which to all appearances had been sufficiently humbled and weakened. A division was thus introduced into the nation and Jeremiah, observant of those who were left behind with him on their own soil, soon came to the conclusion that all that was of worth was among the exiles. They were “the good figs, very good” of his vision by contrast with “the bad, very bad, that cannot be eaten, they are so bad.” He was convinced that the future of the nation lay with the deportees and not with those who had remained in Jerusalem. In other words, the events of 597 had brought the remnant into existence by a remarkable reversal of the prophetic expectation. The nucleus of the new and better Judah would not be found among those who remained when the catastrophe had swept over the land but among the immediate victims of the catastrophe itself, those who were uprooted by it from their native land and their homes.²

¹ vi. 27-30 (for the emendations necessary see the commentaries).

² xxiv.

Not that Jeremiah idealised the exiles without exception. News reached him that there were dangerous elements and undesirable movements among them. The same fanatical hopes which had gathered round the Temple ever since Josiah's reforms now centred upon the sacred vessels which had been taken into captivity. It was unthinkable that Yahweh should allow these to remain in enemy hands, he would act speedily for the vindication of his honour and restore them to their home : with them would return Jehoiachin and his fellow-exiles. We can imagine that this propaganda will have been as unacceptable to Zedekiah as it was to Jeremiah, and it is likely that the king granted him facilities for communicating with the exiles and also protected him when a demand was made to the Temple authorities for his arrest. The letter which he wrote to them shows that for him the future of the nation lay with the deportees in Babylon : their time of waiting would be much longer than they themselves anticipated, but ultimately his hope was theirs : Yahweh would bring them back to their native land and through them would restore the life of their people.¹

I said above that there were two grounds of hope. One of these we have seen, the existence in Babylon of the remnant of which Isaiah had spoken. The other was in Jeremiah himself. He could not of course realise what he was to mean one day to his people, but any guarantee of their future was less in the community in Babylon than in his devotion, amid heartbreak and sorrow, to his mission and to God who had called him thereto. Even when the bond uniting Yahweh and Judah seemed to be wholly severed, that remained which bound the prophet to him. Judah lived on in his unwillingness to despair, in his readiness to offer himself for his countrymen, in that intimate personal relationship with God which could take up into itself his severest trials and disappointments. If sometimes he

¹ xxix.

abandoned a faithless people to destruction, judgment soon gave way to mercy in his heart and he was pleading again for restoration. The link between Yahweh and the nation could not be finally severed, because the nation with all its sins included this man Jeremiah and he remained faithful to the end. The legend of 2 Maccabees shows us what the judgment of his people on him was in after years : they felt that the faith by which they lived had been preserved for them through the exile in the soul of this man. And they were right in so thinking.¹

But sterner trials were ahead of him. If he had so far run with the footmen and grown weary, he was now to contend with horses.² Zedekiah was on the throne, a man of weak character swayed by the latest influences brought to bear upon him and living in fear of his own officials. He plotted rebellion but was unable to carry out his intention ; given a second chance by Nebuchadnezzar, he intrigued again and this time committed himself too far to draw back. Once war became inevitable, memories revived of the great hour in which—for the Isaiah-legend was long since firmly established as history—a man of God had beaten off the foe and kept the city secure by his word. Surely Yahweh would act again in the same way ! And was not Jeremiah there to be consulted ? So Zedekiah played the part which the legend assigned to Hezekiah and sent to the prophet his appeal for a miracle. “ Peradventure Yahweh will deal with us according to all his wondrous works, that he may go up from us.” But Jeremiah refused to play the part of Isaiah. There was no grain of faith in the hearts of these men before him : they had been guilty of the crassest political folly and now expected supernatural intervention to save them from the consequences of it ! True, they might talk of reliance on Yahweh, but the time had gone by for that : why did they not turn to him at the first, when they had to decide whether to revolt or to

¹ 2 Macc. ii. 1-8. ² xii. 5.

remain loyal? So Jeremiah brooded and waited for the inspiration to fall upon him. It came in terrible form. Yes, Yahweh would act, he would display his power when the Babylonian siege-lines were drawn about the city—but his place would be in the camp of the enemy and not within the battlements of the defenders! Nebuchadnezzar was his chosen instrument and by him he would accomplish the judgment which had been so long delayed.¹

So once again for a prophet an end has come to the relation between Yahweh and his people; the divine righteousness and holiness are independent of any earthly attachment and must assert themselves in the destruction of that which they once chose and loved. Not that Yahweh is thus left with none on earth to do his will; since those who knew him have proved disloyal, he must turn, at least for the time being, to those who do not know him. Nebuchadnezzar is no mere heathen conqueror, he is the servant of Yahweh and to him dominion has been given over man and beast. It is by Yahweh's will that his yoke is on the neck of the nations and woe to them if they seek to throw off that yoke before the time foreordained by him!² Already that bold conception is taking shape which will meet us fully developed in the prophet of the Exile, and for which God's work in the world is done by two men; one is the man of the sword, who serves him against his will and the other the man of devotion and suffering, who has made his will wholly one with God's.

For the purposes of this study we shall pass over the incidents of the siege which ended in the fall of Jerusalem, selecting only two episodes for closer attention as illustrating our theme of the prophet as set between God and his nation.

In the first of these, we see that war then had much the same effect as now: it stimulated the social conscience, so that men became ashamed of abuses which they had tolerated all too long. This time it was remembered that

¹ xxi. 1-10.

² xxvii.

the old custom which forbade the reduction of an Israelite to lifelong slavery had fallen into abeyance and that slavery had become an accepted institution. At a solemn ceremony in the Temple, therefore, to the accompaniment of sacrifice and with the king himself taking a prominent part, a covenant was entered into to release all Hebrew slaves at once and to abolish slavery henceforth. We need not doubt that other considerations were of influence as well as humanitarian ones. The capital needed every man it could enlist to defend its walls ; it was dangerous to put weapons in the hands of slaves, whereas, once they had received their freedom, they could be relied on to share the common interest. A few weeks passed by—but what is this movement in the enemy's lines ? All night long the baggage-train has been streaming southwards and now the armed men themselves are on the march. Cries of joy ring through Jerusalem : “ Yahweh is with us again as of old ! the siege is raised ! the city is free ! ” Scarcely has the rejoicing died down when a herald appears in the streets : “ By order of king Zedekiah, let all slaves report to their masters ! ” What was the point in continuing so expensive a reform when the danger which prompted it was past ? On no other occasion, it would seem, was the indignation of Jeremiah aroused as it was then. Hastening to the Temple courts, to the very spot where sacrifice had been offered and the decree ratified, he proclaimed in Yahweh's name *his* edict of emancipation for a faithless people. For such an act they were for ever disowned by him ; no longer under his protection nor united to him by any tie, they were free, free to perish by whatsoever doom their sin might bring upon them ! For the siege had not been raised, the respite was only a temporary one : soon the Babylonians would return and tighten their grip upon the city, till the day when slave and master would perish in the common overthrow.¹

¹ xxxiv. 8-22. .c

The second episode shows us how cautious we must be in drawing the inferences from an utterance which seems to be final and admit of no qualification. For this incident is as hopeful as the other is despairing. The Babylonians did return, the investment of the city was renewed, and by this time Jeremiah was in custody, charged with attempting to desert to the enemy while the gates were open and it was possible to go out and in freely. In this condition he is visited by a kinsman who has a plot of land to sell. To be sure, it is in occupied territory and is likely to fetch but little in the open market. Custom requires that by right of kinship the prophet should have first option upon it : did Hanamel say to himself that if the land was worth anything to anybody, a fifth columnist, a paid agent perhaps of Nebuchadnezzar, might be willing to put down something for it? When Jerusalem fell, *he* might hope to be safe. If such thoughts were in his mind, he must have been astounded when Jeremiah insisted on paying full value for the field and having all legal formalities complied with, arranging moreover for the careful preservation of the deed of sale against the day when he who held it would be in a position to put in his claim to the land. "For thus saith Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel : Houses and fields and vineyards shall yet again be bought in this land." In other words, his action is Yahweh's pledge that Judah will not perish when the capital falls, but that it can hope to continue its life on the soil as before. Here indeed the prophet entertains a hope for those who remain in the land and not merely for the exiles in Babylon. At any rate, he shows himself ultimately a better patriot than any of those fanatics who appealed to Yahweh to save them from the consequences of their political ineptitude : while he must surrender the immediate future to calamity, he is confident that the final destiny of his people is to good and not to evil.¹ Jerusalem fell and the conqueror showed an

¹ xxxii.

unexpected magnanimity: although, as was inevitable under the circumstances, he completed the work of deportation which he began in 597, he left Judah under a governor of its own, appointed from among the pro-Babylonian element in the aristocracy. Gedaliah, it is true, was unable to restore the fortunes of his people, for he was soon murdered. But it was probably in the brief period during which the nation breathed again that Jeremiah's greatest vision came to him, that of the new covenant. Here is something of which we are compelled to use the word "revelation," yet which shows us how God's revelation, even at its highest, makes use of man's reflection.¹

For the experience of a life-time lies behind this oracle, and it can only be understood as we remember that other covenant which Jeremiah had once championed but of which he came afterwards to think less favourably. He had seen, and shared in, the hopes raised by the discovery of the scroll in the Temple, the solemn covenant which bound king and people again to the service of Yahweh, and the drastic measures which had purged the capital of heathenism and stamped out the fertility-rites of the countryside. But time had taught him that this was not the new beginning he had thought it was, the old superstitions and the old immoralities were still powerful, and hearts still clung to the Queen of heaven even while they conformed to the king's decree and called themselves Yahweh's. Under the impact of this experience through which he had passed, he began to question the very foundations of Israel's religion. It seemed as though there was something lacking in that covenant which had been concluded at Sinai and confirmed with such excellent intentions in his own earlier days. The fact that the covenant had been broken was due in part to sin, but that was not the whole explanation. Perhaps it did not do justice to the character of Yahweh as a gracious, as well as a righteous, God. Perhaps it made

¹ xxxi. 31-34. o c

upon human nature demands which could not be met. At any rate, Yahweh would not cast off his people for this failure; in the patience which had marked his dealing with them all through their history, he would give them another chance. This time he would work in subtler, and therefore more effective, ways. He would substitute an inward power for an outward commandment and would be as careful to see that men *could* do his will as that they were aware what it was. So they would be prompted to obedience, no longer by the harsh constraint of law, but by the glad impulse of loyalty and gratitude. The old words: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people," would thus come to stand for an intimate personal relationship far surpassing anything that had as yet been achieved. When that day came, there would be no place for the instruction of the priest nor would the oracle of the prophet be needed any more: what had been the privilege of their special orders would now be accessible to all. None in Israel would lack knowledge of God and there would be no room for distinctions of high and low in a community in which each man knew himself to be standing in direct relation with his Maker. Yahweh and Israel alike would face towards the future, the past obliterated by his mercy. "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more."

All that we have seen hitherto in the mind and life of Jeremiah converges ultimately upon this point. That the overthrow of the nation would not be final he could now see: both in Babylon and in Palestine there were those who would continue its existence. Though Yahweh had been pitted against it in his righteousness and had been compelled to decree its ruin, he had not finished yet with his people. But their restoration would come from him rather than them; the divine initiative of mercy would forestall and provoke the repentance of the people. And the hope which Jeremiah cherished for them—whence did it

arise if not from his own experience of God in prayer and expostulation? He had learned that God does not reject those whom he finds unworthy of his service—for had he not retained him?—and that his will is ultimately to be apprehended only under the form of a close personal communion of the human spirit with the divine. Never was man less tainted with self-esteem than Jeremiah, and his supreme hope for his people was that each of them would arrive at last where God in his goodness had brought him. Having entered himself into the secret place, he dared to believe that all would find it in the end ; what Yahweh had given to his servant was meant for every man in Israel. The hope of the new covenant is the hope that God will bring all men where he, Jeremiah, has been brought. We witness thus the fusion of the two conceptions of the remnant which we have seen in formation ; the group which survives the ruin of the state and the believing soul are to become one.

CHAPTER VI

EZEKIEL

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WITH Ezekiel we are introduced to a literary and historical question of much more far-reaching significance than any we have had to deal with hitherto. For we have to call in question the whole traditional view of the prophet and his place in history. Nowhere else perhaps in the study of the Bible has a position remained unchallenged for so long which on examination turns out to have so little evidence on its side.

The assumption behind almost all work in English on this prophet is that he belonged to the Exile and that his principal contribution to the religion of his people was his blue-print of the reconstructed Temple and the community which was to gather round it, inspired by the sacerdotal ideals of the prophet himself. And it seems at first as though it would be preposterous in the extreme to suggest any other explanation of the book as we have it. Closer enquiry, however, may introduce an element of doubt.

If Ezekiel was indeed a prophet of the first deportation, that under Jehoiachin, it is curious that his denunciations are not directed against his fellow-exiles in Babylon but against those of his countrymen who remain behind in Palestine. Have we any other instance of a prophet who pours out his indignation thus in impassioned language—against people who are not there to hear him? It is quite a new rôle for a prophet to appear in when, instead of braving the evildoers to their face, he denounces them to an interested audience several hundreds of miles away! If we could forget for a moment the occasional allusions to Ezekiel's Babylonian background, would it occur to anyone to suppose that he was speaking otherwise than to

the actual offenders? Surely not. When, for example, Ezekiel resorts to certain complicated and even bizarre actions to bring home his message, how unnatural to suppose that this is for the benefit of those who will not be personally involved! Why act out the siege of Jerusalem and its privations at such distress to oneself when no one is looking on who will ever be in such a siege?¹ The removal of one's household belongings before the eyes of one's neighbours is a piece of sheer play-acting unless the neighbours are people who have something to learn from what is being done.² The opening of this last passage is significant also: "Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of the rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not, which have ears to hear, and hear not; for they are a rebellious house." We are informed expressly that Ezekiel's action is intended as a warning to a perverse people, among whom he is resident, and who are they if not the inhabitants of Jerusalem whose fate is depicted in the sign which follows? We have seen that Jeremiah did not regard the exiles of 597 as "a rebellious house," but as the better and more promising element within the nation. There is some direct evidence that Ezekiel was of the same mind,³ and there is much indirect. For him Jerusalem is emphatically "the bloody city," heathen in origin and with a history of the most shameless immorality.⁴ "The elders of Israel" among whom he lives and who come to consult him are spoken of at one point as men who "have taken their idols into their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face," and at another as heirs of "the abominations of their fathers" and men to whom the prophet is not permitted to speak except in denunciation and threatening.⁵ Such a description, taken by itself, would imply that he was living in or near Jerusalem, certainly not far away in Babylon.

¹ ivf. ² xii. 1-16.³ xi. 14-21.⁴ xxii. 2; xxiv. 6; xvi.⁵ xiv. 2; xx. 4. • •

When we examine the evidence for a Babylonian ministry on the part of Ezekiel, it becomes so complicated as to be in one case quite baffling. In the opening verses of viii we are told how the prophet, sitting among those elders of Israel of whom mention has just been made, is transferred bodily (the original account is much stranger !) to Jerusalem and set down in the Temple there. He goes from room to room within the Temple, witnessing various idolatrous or obscene ceremonies while himself unobserved. At the last scene he is unable to control himself and breaks out into impassioned rebuke, only recovering himself when, to his consternation, one of the men present drops dead at his feet. After an oracle which is not in place at this point, Ezekiel is taken back by the same supernatural agency to Babylon, presumably—though this is not stated—to report what he has seen.¹ How are we to understand all this? For those who are able to take literally the account of how Ezekiel was lifted up by his hair and transported through the air, to be dropped at Jerusalem, there need be no difficulty. Most of us however will prefer to take this either as an ecstatic experience on his part or as the device of a redactor who wishes to provide a Babylonian setting for what actually took place in Jerusalem. On the latter hypothesis, everything becomes simplified at once: the original narrative told how Ezekiel, on a tour of the Temple, met with and challenged to his face one of those who used it for evil purposes, and how his word was so potent that the man in question fell dead on the spot. The former supposition has nothing to commend it, for it only enhances the difficulties in the text. How, for example, are we to understand the sudden death of Pelatiah? Ezekiel, presumably, speaks in Babylon while in a trance-condition: does Pelatiah actually *die* at the same moment in Jerusalem and Ezekiel become aware of it at once, or does he only *imagine* this?

Personally, I find it impossible to resist the force of such

¹ viii-xi.

considerations as these or to understand how anyone can work through the text with Hertrich¹ and not come to his conclusion : Ezekiel was not a prophet of the Exile, but a contemporary of Jeremiah, exercising his ministry in the last days of an independent Judah. True, there are some subsidiary problems which present grave difficulty, and opinion is likely to be divided, for example, over the *terminus ad quem* of Ezekiel's ministry. Did he continue to prophesy after 586 ? If so, was his sphere of activity Palestine or Babylon ? Is the vision of the restored community with which the book closes to be ascribed to the prophet himself or to a disciple or to the redactor responsible for the Babylonian setting in general ? But one may confidently anticipate that research will only confirm the fundamental thesis that the earlier prophecies were actually spoken to those with whom they are concerned and that they belong to the few years which preceded the fall of Judah.

The question of course remains : how came the prophecies uttered in Palestine to be transferred to Babylon ? The responsibility for this rests with a redactor, one who, in my judgment, was a disciple of Ezekiel and who wrote also the first draft of xl-xlviii.

The framework which he constructed to receive the oracles of his master is best studied in the three sections i-iii, viii-xi, and xliii. 1-9. The vision of transcendent divine majesty is common to all three. From the detailed presentation of this in the opening chapter of the book we can infer what its value was for the redactor. Obscure as the text is at certain points, it conveys an impression of the divine omnipresence as well as of the divine splendour : the platform above which the glory of Yahweh appears is supported on wheels which can turn in any and every direction according

¹ *Ezekielprobleme* (1933). Torrey's *Pseudo-Ezekiel* (1930) should also be mentioned in this connection as having demonstrated earlier that the prophecies of i-xxiv. are only at home in Jerusalem : the deductions he draws from this are of course highly questionable.

to the impulse given them by the indwelling spirit.¹ This theophany takes place among the exiles: i.e., the writer seeks to show that the divine presence was with the scattered people even when they had left their native land and wherever in Babylon they might be. In viii-xi we see why the Presence has abandoned the Temple: the sins of the people compelled it to break out in destruction against Jerusalem and finally to forsake it altogether.² But when the appointed time has reached its end and the discipline of exile is complete, the Presence will return to its former dwelling-place.³ The redactor writes for the exiles of his day, to explain to them why they have lost so much but have not lost Yahweh himself: the collected oracles of Ezekiel fill out this schema of withdrawal from Jerusalem, presence in exile, and return, by what they have to offer of rebuke and promise, and they lead up to the final account of what will be when the Jews are again in their own land, a dedicated people. The main point of inferiority in the redactor as compared with the prophet is that his interests are almost exclusively sacerdotal and ritualistic, while those of Ezekiel are also strongly ethical. If it is urged that the redactor must have had some reason for transferring the prophecies from their time to his own, the answer is that by *dating* them in the Exile, he wished to show that they were *significant* for it. As we should say, his argument was that what Ezekiel had said was relevant to the situation in his own later day.

It may be advisable to summarise the conclusions here reached. Ezekiel's ministry lies between "the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity"⁴ and, possibly, a date shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 586: it was thus crowded into a few eventful years. A disciple took his prophecies in written form to Babylon, in many cases in a rough draft, so that we sometimes have two accounts of the same event or two versions of the same prophecy, both

¹ i. 12, 17-21. ² x, xi. 22f. ³ xliii. 1-9. ⁴ 593: i. 2.

of them from Ezekiel's hand.¹ He edited these, adding some from other sources, most notably those concerned with the enigmatic figure of Gog and his fate,² and prefixed them "in the five and twentieth year of our captivity"³ to his sketch of the restored Temple and the community devoted to its maintenance.

It is now possible to ask what experience it was that gave to Ezekiel his sense of vocation and committed him to prophecy. Bertholet suggests⁴ that he had two inaugural visions, the first in Jerusalem (iif.) and the second later in Babylon (i). I prefer, however, to follow Herntrich and regard only the first of these as genuine. Possibly the original opening of the roll-narrative in ii has been broken off; it certainly seems to begin rather abruptly. We must also note the duplicates in ii and iii; there is so much repetition that we probably have before us two accounts of what happened, both going back to the prophet himself. In the vision he is offered a book and is able to read enough of it to know that it is full of threats and forebodings. It is a document, that is to say, which is not likely to be acceptable to anyone.⁵ But he is bidden to eat it as a preliminary to his mission to the nation: "Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go, speak unto the house of Israel." He eats it at the command and finds that its contents are not now as bitter as he had thought at first: "it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness."⁶

How now are we to understand this strange procedure? To take first the point last mentioned, the change in judgment on the book as the result of digesting it; we would say that Ezekiel has accepted a rôle which was at first repellent, but in which he found satisfaction once he had identified himself with it. So much is fairly clear. But what of the roll? It is usually supposed that this prefigures

¹ It is a special merit of Bertholet that he has brought this out so clearly in his commentary by the use of different types.

² xxxviiiif. ³ 573/72: xl. 1.

⁴ *Ezekiel* (1936) in Eissfeldt's *Handbuch zum A.T.*

⁵ ii. 9-10. ⁶ iii. 1-3.

the prophecies which Ezekiel himself is to utter, so that he perceives in advance that they are to be fraught with "lamentations, and mourning, and woe." The difficulty of such an interpretation is, that it makes the prophet take pleasure in his message of doom: on eating the roll, he finds it sweet as honey. Though it is true that Ezekiel seems at times to take an almost ferocious delight in his denunciations and threats, I doubt whether this is what is meant by the language of iii, 3. I suggest therefore that the roll stands for the work of his predecessors which reaches him in written form. He sees that, as Jeremiah was saying at the same time, the prophetic tradition is one of doom, and he nerves himself to follow in the steps of those who have gone before him. As he does so, as he accepts the vocation of a prophet, cost what it may, he finds joy in his calling. In other words, what brings him satisfaction is the prophetic office as such and not particular oracles of doom which he must in due course utter.

This however is a minor point. What is of importance is rather that the object which confronts Ezekiel at the moment of his call is not a natural one—a cooking-pot, a basket of figs, or a locust-swarm, or even a plumb-line—but a book. It is as literature rather than as the living word that prophecy commends itself to him, and he becomes a prophet by being first a student. Here is something quite new, and in accordance with it there is a certain inhumanity and aloofness about Ezekiel which accords with the greyness of theory rather than with the fresh green of life. He is a man of dogma more than of inspiration, with a thesis to defend rather than a people to save. One cannot imagine that there was any community of spirit between him and Jeremiah during those last days in the beleaguered capital.

If however we could penetrate to the meaning for Ezekiel of the address "Son of man," we might be able to understand him better and to appreciate something otherwise hidden from us. But nowhere do we meet with any

explanation of the term and we are left with what is suggested by the language of his inaugural vision, when we are told how he fell to the earth in awe and was bidden stand on his feet again. The second half of i, 28, effects the transition from the redactor's contribution to the prophet's own story, but the latter must have included something like the last sentence of the verse as we have it. We may therefore suppose that the term stood with him for the dual character of his humanity and his mission ; he was at once humbled before God and raised by him to dignity. What he was in his creatureliness and mortality was taken up into the greatness to which he attained as one through whom God willed to speak to men.

In another passage—again one of those which have reached us in duplicate—we see under how heavy a sense of personal responsibility Ezekiel lived and worked. He knows himself to be set as a sentry to warn individuals in Israel of the coming doom and bid them prepare for it : when he fails in this, he will be called to account for the blood of the man who was not warned. He works, as we see elsewhere in his book, with a hard and fast dogma of retribution, for which a man is isolated from his fellows and each act in his life is similarly isolated from other acts. Since a man's fate is thus determined by his conduct at a particular moment, it follows that it may be determined in one way or another by the particular influence which is brought to play upon him at that moment. Therefore the slightest hesitation on the prophet's part might well seal the doom of one who, given the least chance, would have responded in repentance. The impression which these two passages leave upon the reader is that of a man straining beneath a burden he was not meant to bear.¹

If there is one term which better than any other suits the man whose calling has been described above, it is the word " Puritan " in its popular sense. There is something about

¹ iii. 17-21 ; xxxiii. 1-9.

him that is harsh, stern, and forbidding, so that one feels that he was never inwardly in anguish over the fate of the people he was sent to rebuke. Sometimes we can detect a note of fierce exultation, a lyrical delight in the fearful spectacle of destruction which he conjures up. He is an onlooker at that which he describes, he does not participate and suffer in it. He is a man who has always ruled his life by the strictest standards and has no sympathy for those who are not of the same austere type as himself. Like his contemporary Jeremiah, he compares his ministry to the work of a silversmith ; like him, he finds nothing but dross in the crucible when the process is complete ; nevertheless, we feel that if Jeremiah looked in upon it with disappointment, Ezekiel's comment was that he had not expected anything better !¹ It is with surprise that we hear of his affection for his wife and the effort it cost him to restrain his grief at her loss.²

His supreme concern was with the honour and prestige of Yahweh, as is shown by the refrain which constantly recurs throughout his book : " That they may know that I am Yahweh." For our prophet history exists to serve one purpose only, the triumphant vindication of Yahweh in his sole Godhead. But how terrible are the means employed to effect this demonstration ! Nation after nation perishes as the storm of fury sweeps over the Near East, each in its ruin confessing the might of Israel's god.³ In Israel too the corpses of the slain will desecrate the sanctuaries and the land will lie waste when plague has swept away its people and the wild beasts find their lairs in the ruined homes of the people—" and they shall know that I am Yahweh."⁴ There is a monotheism here as grandiose as anything in Second Isaiah, for to be Yahweh is to be God, the only God there is ; but it is a terrifying monotheism which leaves one with a God exulting over a devastated earth and a vanished race of men. For who survives to

¹ xxii. 17-22.² xxiv. 15-24.³ xxv.⁴ vi.

acknowledge the hand of Yahweh? If universal doom is the demonstration of his power, what end does so complete and appalling a demonstration serve? The prophet is not interested in such questions; enough for him that out of the welter and misery of burning cities, depopulated lands, and slaughtered nations the mighty figure of Yahweh looms grander than ever, unquestionable in his sovereignty.

Behind all this lies the importance for Hebrew thinking of the conception of honour. This is not to be identified outright with prestige, as we understand it. "Honour always contains two elements: greatness in oneself and greatness in relation to others, whether there is an equilibrium between the two poles or not." Again: The "substance of the soul, giving it a peculiar stamp, is the honour of the man. Honour is not that which the man himself or others, with more or less justice, think of him. Honour is that which actually fills the soul and keeps it upright. The question of its nature is in so far the central question in the understanding of the soul, involving the very nerve of life: what is it that makes the soul of the Israelite great, wherein consist the values of life?"¹ As Pedersen goes on to point out, the importance of this conception is nowhere more convincingly shown than in the book of Job, where the patriarch contends against God and man for the maintenance of his honour. Thus in the thought of Ezekiel it is not merely what men think about him that is at stake when Yahweh's honour is imperilled, but Yahweh's own reality and power are implicated. His zeal for the honour of Yahweh springs out of a state of mind which we should describe to-day as the struggle for an assurance of his existence. If we read Ezekiel with this in mind we shall be able to judge more charitably what we might otherwise be inclined to dismiss as simply the ascription to God of an all-too-human self-assertion.

¹ Pedersen: *Israel*, I-II, 243, 213.

But there is of course an answer to the question asked above : If the vindication of Yahweh is to be brought about by catastrophe on so large and terrible a scale, who then will be left to profit by the experience? If we remember that Ezekiel is speaking from Jerusalem, we have only to suppose that he shares with Jeremiah his favourable judgment on the exiles of 597 : they, and with them those who will survive the final overthrow of Judah, will be the remnant in which Yahweh's rule will be recognised and by which his purpose will go on to completion. In xi. 14-21 he speaks of the companions of Jehoiachin as " his brethen, the men of his kindred, and all the house of Israel " while " the inhabitants of Jerusalem " are stigmatised as walking " after their detestable things and their abominations." The confidence of the latter will be put to shame, while the redemption of the nation is with the former. Even the repulsive account of Jerusalem the harlot-city ends with a promise of restoration, though, significantly enough, the result of forgiveness will not be renewal of the broken fellowship with Yahweh so much as a haunting sense of shame, arising out of the remembrance of her guilt against him.¹ There is evidence enough therefore that Ezekiel's picture of destruction is not as black and annihilating as it appeared at first to be : he too has hope for a remnant and a fresh beginning of the national life. We shall have more to say of this when the time comes to deal with his expectations for the future.

There is much in Ezekiel's book which would have to be considered were we attempting a complete exposition of his teaching ; e.g., his individualism. Here however we are concerned only with the prophet as a man between two claims, seeking to bring together God and the nation after these have been sharply separated. I pass on therefore to what may be called his " theology of history " as set out in great detail in xx. Here he surveys the history

¹ xvi. 59-63.

of Israel from the Exodus to his own time and finds one pattern running through it from beginning to end. It is governed by just that honour of Yahweh which we have seen to bulk so large in the mind of our prophet. Yahweh chose Israel to be his own and to give him allegiance ; he proposed to reserve this people for himself and demanded in return that they should abjure all other loyalties. "Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt ; for I am Yahweh your God." But alas ! Israel proved refractory and the divine anger was kindled against it : Yahweh's honour demanded the destruction of those who had injured him so. But that was not the only consideration in the divine mind ; the impulse to destroy was checked by the reflection that to sweep Israel from the earth for its sins would gravely lower Yahweh himself in the eyes of the surrounding nations. They would misunderstand what had happened and would ascribe the disappearance of Israel to the weakness or non-existence of its god rather than to his righteous indignation. His name would be profaned, as Ezekiel expresses it here and elsewhere. To avoid such a result Yahweh decided to bear with the rebellious people and gave them a further opportunity. In the wilderness and at the settlement in Canaan Yahweh renewed his claims upon the people, only to be met with insolent rejection. Again he purposed to annihilate them but desisted for the sake of his name, and substituted chastisement for destruction. "I withdrew mine hand, and wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations." Now however the climax of the long process has been reached and the conflict between the will-to-destroy in Yahweh and the will to maintain his honour before men assumes its final form.

At the point in history at which Ezekiel stands the nation, always rebellious, has filled up the measure of its sin and is ripe for destruction. We hear again the denunciations

with which we have grown familiar, against the high places and the fertility-rites, with the introduction this time of a curious etymology for the word "Bamah" used of the former¹; against idolatry and the crowning abomination of human sacrifice; against all that grows out of Israel's dread before the dignity of its own mission and its desire to be like the nations round about. This time, however, Yahweh will act in a new way, so as to resolve the conflict which has hitherto existed in his mind, and to bring the nation at last into a relation of abiding loyalty. He will assert his sovereign rights over them so that these are no longer subject to dispute: "Surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out will I be king over you."² The word "fury" is characteristic of Ezekiel and reminds one of the "jealousy" which is a recurrent theme of Deuteronomy: for both writers Yahweh is a being of intensely passionate nature, resenting insult and reacting vehemently against any violation of his honour.

The extent to which he has been provoked in the prophet's own day is shown in viii-xi, chapters which add to the accusations of xx concerning the high-places others which refer specifically to practices within the Temple itself. There Yahweh's name has been profaned in a more ethical sense than that which has been attached to this expression so far: his holiness is scorned and his claims to allegiance are repudiated. A whole series of idolatrous rites has taken possession of the sanctuary, so that each room which the prophet enters reveals some new horror. First he comes upon a mysterious object referred to as "the seat of the image of jealousy," presumably the altar of some god or goddess of alien origin whom Ezekiel scruples to name. Next he finds himself among a group of animal-worshippers who are burning incense before figures, bestial and human, engraved on the wall. At another point women shrill their

¹ xx. 29. ² xx. 33.

lamentations for the dead divine youth Tammuz, and finally we have clear evidence of sun-worship within the sacred precincts, "between the porch and the altar." What follows in viii. 17 is not at all easy to interpret; we cannot be certain whether it refers to some additional cult or merely continues the expressions of detestation which accompanied the previous disclosures. But the distressing picture is as yet incomplete, for to what has been said of the cult-offences in the Temple must be added the use to which it is put by the clique of twenty-five men who meet there for nefarious purposes: perhaps the text is corrupt, for the proverb alluded to in xi. 3—"This city is the caldron, and we be the flesh"—is not immediately intelligible; but it is clear that the persons spoken of are holders of high office in the city and that the purpose of their gathering is to direct its affairs for their own ends. Ezekiel's tour of inspection closes with a prophecy of doom; the redactor has amplified this with *motifs* drawn from the vision in i and with touches reminiscent of Babylonian mythology,¹ so that Ezekiel's observations are given to the reader in a setting of theophany and judgment.

Ezekiel stands therefore, as he sees it, at a point in time when the vengeance which Yahweh has taken upon a nation which thus injured him by its idolatries and injustice has brought that nation and him with it into disrepute before all the world. The Exile is the crowning demonstration, to all appearance, of the weakness both of the people and of its god. The first problem, that of the restoration of Israel, is dealt with in xx. 33-44, while the second, that of the vindication of Yahweh's injured honour, is more fully dealt with in xxxvi. 16-36: there are of course references elsewhere, but these are the sections with which we shall principally be concerned.

As in Hosea, Israel must return to the wilderness if it is ever to renew its first loyalty, but what was meant literally

¹ ix. 1f.

by the earlier prophet now becomes a metaphor. Yahweh brings his disloyal servants "into the wilderness of the peoples"; they are taken out of their own land into the vast, strange heathen world.¹ There the discipline of Yahweh will sift out the true from the false, the faithful from the disloyal: all alike are eventually to be brought out of the land to which they have been deported, but only the better elements are to find their way back to Palestine. There they will renew the Temple-worship of former days, but this time in spirit and in truth. So doing, they will be accepted again by Yahweh: "As a sweet savour will I accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you in the sight of the nations."²

This reference to the future sanctification of the divine name brings us to our second problem and to its treatment in xxxvi. 16ff. The defeat and captivity of his people have brought Yahweh into grave discredit everywhere they have gone. "When they came unto the nations, whither they went, they profaned my holy name; in that men said of them, These are the people of Yahweh, and are gone forth out of his land." In other words, the holiness of Yahweh was impugned and doubt cast on his Godhead by the fact that he had proved impotent to protect his people and had looked on, either unable or unwilling to intervene, when they were deported from the soil which was both theirs and his. A modern would say that the disasters which had befallen Israel showed that its religion was without foundation; the ancient mind was able, in a manner which is incomprehensible to us, to conceive of the possibility that a god might exist, though events had demonstrated that he could not meet the needs of his worshippers. They thought of him as our fathers did of Napoleon after Waterloo: he was a ruler so discredited

¹ xx. 35. ² xx. 41.

by defeat that it was foolish for his subjects to continue loyal to him.

Yahweh must accordingly act because, as we might put it, his own interests compel him to do so. Ezekiel indeed asserts most emphatically that when he does act, it will be for this reason and no other. "I had pity on my holy name," and again: "I do not this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name, which ye have profaned among the nations, whither ye went." As a demonstration of his power and reality, Yahweh will restore his people to their land, and this will convince the nations: "the nations shall know that I am Yahweh, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes." The restoration of Israel will re-establish the honour of Yahweh, because all will now be forced to admit that he is concerned for his people and active on their behalf. But it is for his own sake and not for theirs that he does this. With Ezekiel, the ruin and the deliverance of nations serve one and the same end—the glory of the mighty God who governs them.

How are we to judge this anthropopathic type of thinking about God? Taken simply as it stands it is repulsive, for God is credited with a self-concern and self-assertion which would be blameworthy in his creatures. It arises in part out of the difficulties which inevitably attend on any frankly personalist conception of God. Since God is not one being alongside of others but is the ground of our life and the moral reality which sustains it, the absolute values are not to be thought of as subsisting somehow apart from him, but as belonging to his very being. It is of the essence of the human situation that we are in the world to serve ends greater than, and beyond, ourselves: since this is not so with God, it follows that all analogies are inadequate at this point. If we have to choose between God as the jealousy which is assertive of its own claims and the love which is careless of them, we should prefer the latter alternative, though it in turn falls far short of the

reality. Our best solution of the problem is to think of God alternately as person and as the kingdom of absolute values, recognising that each mode of thought lacks something which the other can supply.

But another approach to the problem is possible. We can take Ezekiel's thought of God as the projection into the divine mind of what was working in his own. If he speaks of Yahweh as exercised all through the history of Israel by this conflict between the indignation which prompts him to destroy his people and the concern for a larger issue which bids him preserve them, he is only reflecting in this the problem with which he was himself contending all the while. His sense of justice and his understanding of what Israel owed to Yahweh made it impossible for him to palliate the offences of the nation ; its history was disfigured by rebellion and disloyalty so persistent and apparently so ingrained that he was driven to despair of the future and willingly handed over to the forces of destruction a people so stubborn in apostasy and so averse from their spiritual mission. Nevertheless there was that in the past which made him unwilling so to surrender them ; the mercy of the Exodus could not finally be frustrated, it was not thinkable that the nation to which Yahweh had bound himself so closely should one day come to mean nothing whatsoever to him ; finally, were there not resources of wisdom and mercy in him which might even avail to win them back, if not wholly then in part, if not now then in the future when calamity had taught them the lesson of fidelity ? So the prophet debated within himself, the resolve to abandon his people to their deserved fate struggling continually against his appreciation of their unique rôle in history and of the close connection between their own fate and the spiritual values they were meant to serve. Read in this way, his reconstruction of the doctrine of the remnant in terms of the sanctification of the divine name after it has been profaned by Israel's sin suggests that there were

milder features in Ezekiel's conception of God and that these in the end prevailed for him over the sterner ones.

The presence of such milder features is not, however, mere matter of inference. Even when Ezekiel's dogmatic individualism asserts itself in its crudest and most uncompromising form, we can trace in it "something of a genuine anguish over sinful men in the heart of the prophet as of Yahweh. "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked ; but that the wicked turn from his way and live : turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ; for why will ye die, O house of Israel ? " ¹ He protests that judgment is forced from Yahweh by the sin of men and that his will towards them is one of justice and even of mercy. That being the case, we find that the change in the fortunes of the nation is not to be accounted for merely by Yahweh's concern for his own honour : it springs also out of his goodness and takes the form, not only of restoration to Palestine, but of inward renewal also.

It is at this point that Ezekiel rises to the full stature of a great prophet, worthy even to rank with his contemporary Jeremiah. In xxxvii. 1-14 in the vision of the valley of bones he has given expression in language of almost incomparable sublimity to his faith in God and his unquenchable hope for his nation, even in an hour which invites to despair. It is one of the merits of the view of Ezekiel here taken that it allows us to identify the valley of dry bones with a valley outside Jerusalem in which, before the very eyes of our prophet, lay the corpses of the men who had perished in some ineffectual struggle against the besiegers. This is no mere exercise of prophetic imagination, it is the transfiguration of some phenomenon perceived by the prophet till it becomes for him fraught with revelation, and as such it can fitly be compared with the visions of Amos and Jeremiah. The dead men's bones symbolise for him the frustrated hopes of his people ; all is lost and there

is no possibility of recovery ! We cannot fully appreciate what this description meant to Ezekiel and his hearers alike unless we bear in mind that for the Hebrew " the bones are the soul." " If the bones are strong and firm, then the soul is strong ; it manifests itself just as well in them as in the heart of any other vital organ."¹ But as he contemplates the moribund and seemingly hopeless condition of his people, the assurance comes to him that in Yahweh there are inexhaustible resources of just that vitality which is lacking in them, and that with him is the possibility of renewal. He will be able to accomplish what seems to be impossible and quicken a dead people to life again. Out of its present desperate condition, the capital stormed, king and nobility in exile, and those who remain disillusioned and resigned to their fate, Yahweh will create one day a community knit together in his service and capable of accomplishing his will among mankind. It will be all the work of his spirit, his limitless energy and unbounded creativity, that in him which is the source of ever fresh possibilities and delights to turn the incredible into the actual.

The restoration of Israel is described at one point in political terms as the recovery of its lost unity under a king of David's house. It would seem as though at this stage (shortly after 586) those who remained behind in Palestine were still in touch with some among the descendants of those deported in 722 from the Northern Kingdom, so that it was possible to entertain the hope of a re-union.² More important for our purpose is the passage in which Ezekiel comes remarkably near to the prophecy in Jeremiah of the new covenant, with its promise of an inward obedience and a new relation to Yahweh as the spring of this.

Yahweh, at the time of the return to Palestine, will take the initiative in mercy and will cleanse his people from all that defiled them in the past. He will deal, not merely

¹ Pedersen : *Israel*, I-II, 172.

² xxxvii. 15-28. .

with overt actions, but with the ultimate motives for conduct, so that where apostasy and rebellion have been as it were second nature to the people they will now be prompt to obey. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you : and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." Yahweh will undertake the remaking of human nature, so that its impulses will tend henceforth to good and not to evil. Man needs a power from beyond himself, such a power as that which claims the prophet and equips him to serve God ; in the coming days that power will be accessible to all.¹ We must of course be on our guard against any crassly literalistic interpretation of this prophecy as implying a salvation entirely *ab extra*, a manipulation of passive human nature by Yahweh. It is not likely that Ezekiel would ever have repudiated his earlier appeal that the people should make for themselves the new heart and the new spirit that were needed :² what man does in this connection is not opposed to what God does, as the Hebrew mind saw no inconsistency in ascribing the hardness of Pharaoh's heart sometimes to himself and sometimes to Yahweh. The prophet has not our categories at his disposal, but what he means is surely that Yahweh will so manifest himself in judgment and mercy as to win the allegiance of those who survive to profit by the experiences through which they have been led by him.

Although it has been suggested above that the closing chapters of Ezekiel's book come not from himself but from a disciple in Babylon during the opening phase of the Exile, they are so closely associated with him in our minds that some notice needs to be taken of them before this chapter is brought to a conclusion. For the redactor who is responsible for this sketch of a restored community and a rebuilt Temple, these two facts of the future are meant

¹ xxxvi. 24-28. ² xviii. 31.

to serve as the final demonstration of Yahweh's Godhead and the final vindication of his injured honour. The Presence which withdrew in horror at the abominations perpetrated within the sanctuary will be able to return there when it stands in the midst of a dedicated people of whose continued loyalty there need now be no fear. The name of the city will therefore be "Yahweh is there."¹ Jerusalem and its Temple will be evidence to the whole world that when Yahweh let his people go into exile, he did so not because he was powerless to save them but because he intended their captivity as a discipline which should wean them from all other allegiances and reserve them wholly for himself. The great defect of the redactor's expectation is that the demonstration of Yahweh he provides is so largely of an external character. Something is said, it is true, of the need for justice in the life of the restored community,² but what his heart is set on is the restored sanctuary and the punctilious discharge of its prescribed ritual. He therefore falls far below his master, who showed himself a genuine prophet in that what he asked from his people was repentance and what he promised them was renewal in heart and spirit by the gracious visitation of Yahweh.

Let us now seek to sum up what Ezekiel had to contribute to the solution of that problem of God and the nation by which he was exercised, like the others who went before him. In him, as in Isaiah and Jeremiah, we come upon two lines of thought, one leading to the *survival* of a remnant and the other to the *creation* of one. With him, however, they begin to draw together and we can see how the fusion of the two expectations will be effected. What is assumed in Jeremiah is here expressly stated, those who survive after disaster has overtaken the nation will be those to whom Yahweh will reveal himself in a new and gracious

¹ xlviii. 35. ² xlv. 9ff.

form, so that they become capable of obedience and continuous loyalty. It is those who have been brought back into their own land who will be cleansed and to whom a new heart and a new spirit will be given. In them will be accomplished the amazing transformation which is nothing less than the resurrection of a dead nation.

But exactly how was the renewal to take place in the restored community? Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel answered that it would come about by the act of Yahweh, establishing a new covenant with Israel or cleansing them from the shame and disgrace of the past. What was hidden from them was that this act of Yahweh would come about very largely through *their* instrumentality: they were called not only to foresee in this respect the shape of things to come but also to determine it. The new covenant would only be possible because of that personal relationship with God into which Jeremiah had entered and which he would communicate, by life and word, to his fellows. The spirit would reanimate the dry bones only because the soul of Ezekiel had been opened to its vitalising influence. Here we return to Isaiah who, in the hour of his rejection by king and people, gathered around him those who shared his faith and waited for the day which would vindicate his patience. There was a believing community which came into existence thus and was continued from generation to generation: this *was* the remnant while the nation still stood and when the nation fell it was able in some measure to *make* a remnant out of those who survived the catastrophe. In other words, the prophets solved their problem as much by their lives as by their messages: when the old link between Yahweh and Israel had snapped, they forged a new one without fully realising what they did, so that even when their conscience surrendered Israel to destruction for its disloyalty, *their* conscience and *their* loyalty availed to secure its survival. How this was done we shall see more clearly in our final chapter.

CHAPTER VII

SECOND ISAIAH

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WITH the transfer of Ezekiel to the last days of Jerusalem, we are left with Second Isaiah as the one great prophetic figure of the Exile. Any attempt, however, to do for him what we have done for his predecessors and to reconstruct that encounter with God from which he went forth committed to his life-work is attended with peculiar difficulty, just because of the complete lack of any such autobiographical material as we have at our disposal in their case. That the very name of this prophet is lost is no mere accident of history, it is in accordance with that concealment of himself behind his mission which is characteristic of him. We have no narrative of his life, but his call can be reconstructed in some measure from the opening section of his book and the earliest of the Servant-poems.

Second Isaiah belongs evidently to the closing years of the Exile and he comes forward with a message of hope. What Israel has suffered has been sufficient atonement for its sin and the time has come when Yahweh is about to act for his people's deliverance. There is not the slightest hint that the prophet has reached this conclusion by inference from political conditions in his day : it is part of the "counsel of Yahweh" which has been revealed to him and which he is commissioned to declare to his fellow-countrymen. As he describes the revelation, it comes, not by some direct invasion of his consciousness, but as a conversation in the unseen which he merely overhears. In that conversation three voices take part. The first proclaims the impending theophany : Yahweh wills to restore his people to their own land, and to this end he will transform the country

over which they must travel. Such action on his part will manifest his Godhead to the whole world. The injunction to prepare in the desert a highway for God and his deliverance is presumably addressed to the forces or beings who wait on him, ready to execute his will as it is made known. In these opening sentences we are introduced to the main theme of Isaiah's teaching during the first phase of his work : direct action by Yahweh for Israel's deliverance and the manifestation of his glory thereby before the whole world. The second voice, speaking again from the supernatural sphere, calls for a prophet to bring this message to the exiles. The third party to the conversation accepts this duty by asking what the message of such a prophet will be, and the second voice bids him speak of the evanescence of all human things and the stability of Yahweh's dealing with his people.¹

To whom does this third voice belong ? It is the prophet become for the time being another than himself ; he sees his acceptance of the prophetic office as though it were the act of someone else. Second Isaiah possesses to an extraordinary degree the power to transcend himself and to enter by sympathetic insight into the experience of others ; this is what enables him to describe the relation between Yahweh and Israel in such intimate fashion, so that we forget that the latter is not an individual but a community. As the counterpart of this, he is able to view his own experience from outside and to describe what actually happened to himself as though it concerned another. If the interpretation of the Servant-poems which will be given later in this chapter is sound, we have there the supreme illustration of this gift. For a parallel in modern literature we could not do better than cite the case of Kierkegaard, whose pseudonyms are at once transcripts of his own experience and sympathetic reconstructions of that of other people.

¹ xl. 3-8.

What then is the content of the message he is to deliver? Again, it is most noticeable that there is no reference to contemporary events, as though it is rather an experience of God than a reading of what is happening about him which makes of this man a prophet. He is to emphasise the transitoriness of the human and the permanence of the divine. This is at once a rebuke and an encouragement to the exiles: a rebuke, because they have become disheartened with the passage of the years and the frustration of the hopes which they once entertained; an encouragement, because the heathen empire which has them in its grip is as short-lived as everything else in this world. One certainty remains: "The word of our God shall stand for ever." This word is the promise given to the generation which lived through the disaster of 586, the promise of eventual restoration to their native land. Amid all the changes of history and the passing of the generations, God remains faithful and the time is at hand when he will fulfil his pledged word.

In xlix. 8-13 we are initiated into a profound inner experience of the prophet's which perhaps accompanied this and perhaps followed on it. In either case, it may well be included within his call. He has prayed for his people and the answer has come; the time for their return is now not far off. But something more is revealed to him: Yahweh needs a man to lead his people home, and for that he has singled out the prophet. He is to be the new Moses through whom a wonder surpassing that of the Exodus is to be accomplished. Perhaps this secret lies unexpressed in the background of all prophecies of the first period.

In the sequel I shall suggest the inclusion of this passage in the group of Servant-poems: that, of course, involves the identification of the Servant with the prophet in some sense. I should prefer to say that the Servant personifies Second Isaiah's sense of mission; he represents the rôle for which he knows himself to be cast. Or one might say

that the prophet projects upon an ideal figure what belongs in the first instance to himself. This is not the view generally accepted, for in this country at any rate commentators still prefer to see in the Servant an application of the category of "corporate personality," as Dr. Wheeler Robinson has familiarised us with it.¹ While I do not question the validity of this idea, I am not convinced that it is applicable to the Servant-poems. The figure which appears in them has a definite mission to the nation and as such must surely be distinguished from it. It is true that those who take this view point out that the corporate personality may be regarded as embodied in some peculiar fashion in a representative individual, king or prophet. But they do not go so far as to use this modification of the theory here : if they did, it would lead them to identify the Servant at least in some places with the prophet, so that the difference between the two theories would be considerably reduced. However, the final test of the view I have taken will be in its applicability to the various poems when the time comes to explain these.

In xlix. 1-6 we have virtually a second call, when the prophet knows himself sent not to Israel only, but to mankind. He looks back upon his life and sees that it is with him as it was with Jeremiah, he was in the world that he might be the Servant. He was shaped for this purpose from the beginning, equipped for the task of prophecy and destined to be in Yahweh's hand as a sword in the battle of good against evil. But when he measures his achievement against his vocation, he is acutely conscious of failure. What exactly has given him this sense of frustration we have no means of knowing ; it may have been nothing of any outward importance. The divine voice assures him that, if he has failed, it is not because he has attempted too much, but because he has attempted too little. He has not thought generously enough of the purpose of Yahweh : how could

¹ In *Werden & Wesen des Alten Testaments* (1936), 49ff.

he suppose that he would be content merely with the restoration of Israel to its own soil? The mighty God of whom he spoke in xl with such eloquence and who revealed himself as the one security amid the changes of mortal life—he cannot be content with less than the deliverance of mankind. Let him therefore learn that he is meant to be a light to the nations and salvation to the ends of the earth, and with the acceptance of this larger and worthier task there will be given to him the strength he needs. So the prophet attains to that world-vision and that passion for the deliverance of mankind which make of him the first great missionary spirit of whom we have knowledge.

A careful reading of the prophecies which have come down to us under the name of Second Isaiah shows that, leaving aside for the time being the Servant-poems, they fall into two groups: some speak by name of Cyrus or refer to him indirectly as the deliverer to whom the emancipation of the exiles will be due, while others describe rather a direct intervention on the part of Yahweh, a theophany which will issue in the transformation of nature and the return of Israel to its own land. One and the same result is reached by two different roads, a political and military one in the first case and a supernatural one in the second. How are these two distinct conceptions to be related? There is no room for Cyrus in the poems which describe Yahweh as intervening in person for his people: he is himself the mighty warrior who acts on their behalf. That is clear from the following passage: "Yahweh shall go forth as a mighty man; he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, he shall shout aloud; he shall do mightily against his enemies. I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry out like a travailing woman; I will gasp and pant together. I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands, and will dry up the pools. And I will bring the blind by a way that they

know not ; in paths that they know not will I lead them: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight."¹ Here an intervention is described which admits of no human intermediary ; the warrior's part which is elsewhere ascribed to Cyrus is here assigned to Yahweh himself. It seems best, therefore, to suppose that the prophet at first anticipated just such a divine intervention as is here described but that later, as the Persian aspirant to power appeared, came to see in him the instrument which would be employed by Yahweh. If this is so, there will have been two phases in the ministry of Second Isaiah, and it is only in the second of these that the figure of Cyrus appears. The exposition which follows will take this assumption as its starting-point.²

It is not possible to fix a date for the beginning of Second Isaiah's activity. Begrich, to be sure, would assign it to the year 553 or 552, but this is dependent on the view, rejected above, that the immediate occasion for his appearance as a prophet was the rebellion of Cyrus the Persian against Astyages the Mede and the repercussions of this throughout the Middle East. It seems to me that even Begrich here fails to follow up his own suggestion, and gives too great a part to Cyrus. We may be content therefore to date the earliest oracles in the second half of the exile and before the prophet's attention had been drawn to Cyrus.

That Yahweh will act on behalf of his people he is sure, as also that the end he seeks to achieve is the restoration of Zion. The use of the name " Zion " in this connection is significant, for the prophet's hopes gather round a religious community rather than a nation. Zion is not now merely the hill on which the Temple stands, it is the centre of, and symbol for, Israel as a people dedicated to the service of Yahweh and bearing witness to him before the world.

¹ xlii. 13-16 ; cf. xl. 9-11 ; xlix. 22-26.

² I am here greatly indebted to Begrich : *Studien zu Deuterjesaja* (1938).

News is passed from watchman to watchman, as messengers hasten Zionwards with tidings of the return of her sons and daughters, so long exiled from her, and the very ruins seem to sing for joy. The nations of the world look on with holy awe at the acts of this mighty God, and the gates of Babylon open to allow the triumphal procession to begin its journey across the desert, bearing in its midst the sacred vessels. The description of the departure from Babylon shows that it belongs to a time when the city had not yet fallen to Cyrus, as also that no human intervention on Israel's behalf is contemplated. The exiles go forth in a peaceful procession, Yahweh himself supplying all the protection they require. "For Yahweh will go before you ; and the God of Israel will be your rearward."¹

The glowing accounts of the transfiguration of nature which constitute some of the most beautiful passages in Second Isaiah belong with these expectations of divine intervention. They are by no means original with our prophet but are taken over by him from the religious tradition of his people. The spirit-filled Davidic ruler of Isaiah xi passes over already, without any sense of incongruity, into the *Heilbringer* who restores the Golden Age in which the harmony of man and beast was as yet unbroken. But in the prophet of the exile these mythical features have a purpose to serve ; the transformation of the desert by springs and oases will ease the path of the returning exiles. Groves of trees will spring up to provide them with shade, mountains will be levelled, and the rough places will be made smooth for the feet of the travellers.² It is a splendid picture that takes shape before the prophet's mind. Like a festal procession, the exiles cross the desert with song and mirth, streams flowing through the sands as they march along and cool groves waiting for them in the heat of the noonday sun. As they reach their journey's end, the people who still inhabit Jerusalem, warned of their

¹ lii. 7-12. ² xli. 17-20 ; xl. 3-5.

coming by swift messengers, go out to meet them, and together the two companies set to work on the rebuilding of their city. How different from all this the actual facts of the return ! Cyrus, no doubt, was ready to honour Yahweh as he had already honoured Marduk, and with a campaign against Egypt in his mind, it was in his interests to resettle Judah with a people disposed to be friendly. But only a few thousands went back, to find the land reluctant to respond to their labour, their enemies vigilant and their kinsfolk half-hearted, so that when at last they plucked up heart to rebuild the Temple, there were those among them who wept as they contrasted the sorry structure with the splendid building in which they had worshipped once.¹ But the spirit of the people proved indomitable, Zion did rise again and, though after a fashion unlike anything of which Second Isaiah dreamed, she did serve for the conversion of the nations.

For Yahweh wills the restoration of his people to their own land, not because his purpose in history will be accomplished so, but because he will be able through them to reach mankind. The transformation of the wilderness is not so much for Israel's benefit as for a demonstration to the world of the might of its God. "That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of Yahweh hath done this and the Holy One of Israel hath created it."² So, at the call of the prophet, it was said that all flesh must one day see of what power Yahweh is.³ When Yahweh makes bare his holy arm, he does it in the sight of all the nations, so that his salvation is seen by all the ends of the earth. The theophany which is deliverance to Israel is at the same time an irresistible appeal to the heathen world; before such stupendous achievements they stand amazed and recognise in the God who can transform the desert the Power beside whom all their gods are vain and worthless.⁴

¹ Ezra iii. 12.² xli. 20.³ xl. 5.⁴ lii. 10.

What rôle is assigned to Israel in the conversion of the world? Little indeed, it would seem. If Israel is in the world as Yahweh's servant and witness, there is no suggestion here of any activity or propaganda.¹ It is true that in one passage the prophet sees proselytes coming to attach themselves to Israel and to join the community as worshippers of Yahweh; but even that is rather a response to the mighty acts which have been performed before their eyes than as a result of any teaching they have received from Jews.² Israel is to convince the nations, not by what it does but by what is done to it, though clearly the fact that it recognises Yahweh as its deliverer is an essential part of the demonstration which he offers in delivering it. The necessity of fidelity on Israel's side is surely implied in the reference to Abraham as the father of the nation.³ But in the main what is asked of Israel is no more than to be the point at which Yahweh makes himself evident in world-history.

There is something in this picture of coming events which reminds one of Ezekiel, but something also which shows how far the later prophet surpasses the earlier in spirit. There is the same expectation of a convincing demonstration of Yahweh's Godhead; for both alike history moves towards an hour of revelation in which the nations will know that he is Yahweh. But the means by which this end is secured are fundamentally divergent in the two cases. If for Ezekiel Yahweh shows his greatness by the annihilation of his foes on so grand and so appalling a scale that we are left wondering who then remains alive to be convinced by this, for Isaiah it is the deliverance of his servants, the release of a captive people and their reinstatement on their own land, which is to show who is at work and how mighty he is. And the nations of the world look on at this and realise its force; such a complete reversal of human calculations can only come about by the intervention of one whose claims to Godhead rob all others of their value. Second Isaiah is

¹ xlili. 10.² xliv. 1-5³ xli. 8-10..

confident that the nations are capable of such an inference from observed facts to their origin in the will of God ; in modern language, there is a strain of rationalism in him and he has no doubts in the matter of natural theology. The conversion of the nations, and not their destruction, is the manifestation of Yahweh's glory for¹ which he looks, and it should be enough for Israel's pride that it can serve as an instrument for the achievement of this.

Not that Second Isaiah, at least at this phase of his work, is wholly free from nationalist and particularist tendencies. If we reflect that his proclamation of what we may call—to borrow an expression used by C. G. Montefiore¹ in another connection—"a dramatic *coup* from heaven" is not original with him but is derived from the tradition of his people, we shall not be surprised that some of the less pleasing features of that tradition have left their mark even upon one so great as he. Thus Israel is promised at one point the complete discomfiture of its adversaries rather than their conversion,² and at another the prophet actually employs the crude imagery of Oriental revenge and tells his countrymen, apparently with satisfaction, that they will live to see their enemies "drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine."³ But undue emphasis should not be placed on two or three isolated passages ; they are survivals of a mode of thinking which the prophet has himself long since outgrown, though its influence continues as a heritage from the past in which, for all his originality and breadth of vision, he is deeply rooted as a man of his people:

This "dramatic *coup* from heaven," this direct intervention of Yahweh for his exiled people, did not, however, take place. Would it ever do so ? This was the doubt which at some point began to torment the prophet. We appear to have a reflection of this state of mind in a passage which forms a parallel to the "confessions" of Jeremiah, Second Isaiah pouring out his soul before God and receiving

¹ Synoptic Gospels (2nd ed.), vol. i., 185. ² li. 22f. ³ xlix. 26.

the reassurance which enables him to continue his work.¹ As men naturally do in such circumstances, he appeals from the uncertainty of the present to the great certainties of the past out of which the faith of his people grew. Yahweh seems to be inactive, but he cannot really be so: the prophet recites the great deeds of the Creation and the Exodus as evidence of what he can accomplish and appeals to him to put forth now the power which he exercised so wonderfully then. Will he not add to these two miracles of long ago the third which will lead his people from Babylon to Zion, with songs of triumph on their lips? The reply comes that he must not give way to his fears, but must remember the assurance which came to him at his call, the assurance that God abides amid the change and mortality of men. Let him not despair, as though the grip of the conqueror will never be loosened, for the Creator and Ruler of nature is pledged to their release. Finally, he is reminded of how Yahweh has chosen him personally, equipped him with his spirit and reserved him as his instrument in the day when the God who fashioned heaven and earth will go on to his new wonder and rebuild Zion before the eyes of the nations.

The immediate answer to the prophet's appeal was a summons to patience and the assurance that Yahweh would surely fulfil his purpose in his own time. But it would seem that events were soon to amplify this answer and to give to the prophet the conviction that the action for which he looked would not be long delayed, but that when it came it would take a form very different from his original anticipation. Yahweh would not strike in directly but would use a human intermediary, Cyrus, the Persian chieftain who was making a bid for world-power. When Cyrus appears on the prophet's horizon, he is already established in men's minds as a formidable warrior, a conqueror with a whole series of successes to his credit and his treasury enriched by

¹ li. 9-16.

the spoils of war.¹ It is a fairly obvious conjecture that the first notices of him in Second Isaiah belong to the period immediately after the overthrow of Lydia (546): it was now evident that a rival had risen capable of matching himself with Babylon.

But the prophet discerns in this 'bold aspirant to power a significance which is hidden from all other eyes: Cyrus is an instrument in the hands of Yahweh, and he, like Israel and Abraham, is in the world as his servant.² True, he is Yahweh's servant in a somewhat different sense, for while they are consciously dedicated to him, Cyrus gives service without knowing that he does so. He but pursues his own ambitions, intent on conquest and plunder, little knowing that he fulfils ends greater than any which he has set to himself and that when the hour of final victory comes, he will lay his spoils at the feet of one in whom he sees only the tribal god of a defeated people but who is in reality the mighty Lord of heaven and earth. Yahweh's intention is to use him for the liberation of his people, and it matters little for that purpose whether he who accomplishes it is or is not conscious of what he does. "I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me."³ At one point indeed we are given to understand that Cyrus is in some sense a worshipper of Yahweh;⁴ but that may well have been either a too generous interpretation of the Persian religion or an inference of the prophet's that he whom Yahweh so honours must surely acknowledge his benefactor.

But not merely is this heathen prince a servant, he is also Yahweh's anointed, as though his mission was in some sense a continuation of that of the Davidic kings.⁵ He is the man whom Yahweh has singled out to act for him in the supreme crisis of history, so that he is for the time being his agent and deputy, his acts being in some real sense also Yahweh's acts by means of him. It is indeed a magnificent conception and while the germ of it is no doubt already

¹ xli. 2; xlv. 1-7. ² xliv. 28. ³ xlv. 4. ⁴ xli. 25; ⁵ xlv. 1.

present in Jeremiah's recognition that Nebuchadnezzar has come to world-dominion by the will of Yahweh, it is none the less boldly and strikingly original. At this juncture in history the divine theophany is replaced by the sword of a heathen conqueror ; what Yahweh might have done by the manifestation of himself in majesty he does by choosing and utilising this man to whom he is unknown. The whole world, it is clear, is the sphere of his activity and he finds his agents among the heathen when he needs them.

The service which Cyrus has been elected to render is of course the liberation of Israel. "For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel my chosen, I have called thee by thy name."¹ If it is said in one passage that he will let the exiles go without reward,² it is said in another that for this loss, a paltry one when measured by any political standard, he will be compensated by the addition of empires to his dominion.³ This, of course, is not meant in any unworthy sense ; Yahweh needs Israel for the fulfilment of a purpose which lies far beyond it. As the armies of Cyrus march that Zion may be rebuilt, so the walls of Zion rise again, not merely that Israel may once more have a home, but that mankind may through Yahweh's action in its history be led out of superstition, ignorance and fear into the truth of God. The campaign of Cyrus against Babylon has its place, as we might say, among the evidences of religion ; it discredits the gods of the heathen world and authenticates the prophets of Yahweh. The final outcome of the whole course of events is described by Second Isaiah in one of his most magnificent passages.⁴ We stand in imagination on the hill of Zion : who are these pilgrims who wind along the roads from the South, tall dark-skinned figures with their burdened animals in a long caravan stretching out behind them ? Awed by the revelation of the mighty God, they have come

¹ xl. 4. ² xl. 13. ³ xlii. 3.

⁴ xl. 14-17 : I accept Principal Elmslie's suggestion that "in chains" should be deleted as "a gloss in bitter spirit." That, of course, makes it uncertain to which period of the prophet's ministry, the passage belongs.

from remote lands to pay homage in the city which is sacred to his name. Now they understand what had been hidden from them so long. He whom they had despised as merely the tribal god of a defeated people was all the while the one true God, and he alone is worthy to be worshipped. "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour."

So certain is the prophet that the success of Cyrus's arms, just because that success is not so much his own as Yahweh's, will have the same convincing effect upon the nations as the theophany for which he originally hoped, that he is prepared to anticipate it and to stake Yahweh's claim to Godhead on the fulfilment of this prophecy. He knows that in assigning so glorious a destiny to Cyrus he is far outrunning all current political expectations, and that he has against him the confident forecasts of Babylon's seers. But he is willing to challenge all comers in the name of Yahweh: where is the god who had the insight to foresee the emergence of this man?¹ Evidently the advance of Cyrus is lending point to his words, and those who were once disposed to scoff are now compelled to realise that the Persian is a menace to be reckoned with, however little they may doubt the power of Babylon to meet him. He pictures a scene of controversy in which the nations champion the claim of their respective gods and in which Israel appears as witness for Yahweh: the history of the nation and the succession of prophets which arose in the midst of it—what better evidence of his reality is desired than these? By comparison with him the gods of Babylon show themselves powerless and ineffectual. What are they then? Nonentities, mere names on the lips of men.²

There is in this something of that rationalism to which reference has been made above. No doubt the argument from prophecy was in common use in the ancient world, but with the prophet of the Exile it becomes a theological con-

¹ xliv. 24-28. ² xliii. 9-13; xli. 21-29.

ception of the highest importance, a weapon in the hands of the champion of monotheism as he attacks the religion and superstition of the heathen world about him. He has in mind, we need to remember, something of a much higher order than mere prediction of the future, and that in two respects. In the first place, Yahweh's ability to foretell what course events will take is but the natural consequence of the fact that he has shaped that course himself. The Lord of history alone knows the forms which history will assume.¹ In the second place, the gift with which he endows his servants has reference to the past as well as to the future. It is knowledge of the laws which govern history, the principles of that moral order which Yahweh maintains unchanged amid the transitoriness of human life. "Declare ye the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them." He who fully understands what happened in the past will have a knowledge which others do not have of the future which grows out of the past. The prophet's power to predict rests therefore ultimately on the fact that he has been admitted to the counsel of Yahweh, or as we should put it, that he is familiar with the moral laws by which in the last resort the world is governed.² It is perhaps worth remarking here as a further instance of how Second Isaiah suppresses himself and concentrates attention on his work and his God, that the credit of the prophet himself was even more at stake in these prophecies of Cyrus than that of Yahweh. But of this he never speaks.

There is theology in this man, argument from prophecy and scornful polemic against the folly of idol-worship. But his main concern is not with the defence of any doctrine or even the spread of one religion, but with the deliverance of mankind from spiritual bondage. Here is one who yearned to give to the remotest peoples of the earth what Israel had found in God. The light which shone upon this

¹ xli. 4.

² xli. 21-24.

one nation was now to be lifted up by them so that all might walk by it ; the God who had given himself to them now waited for the whole of seeking humanity to find its rest in him. So the compassion of God breaks out in the appeal of a man to his fellows, and stretching out his arms, he invites all the nations of the earth to draw near.⁹ " Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth : for I am God, and there is none else." Yahweh's purpose is fixed and he will win for himself the recognition of all that live, not because this will add to his prestige, but because he alone has the succour and deliverance men need so much. If he is exalted thus above all human things, it is as the great helper, " a just God and a saviour."¹

Exactly how are we to think of this acceptance by the heathen world of the truth committed to Israel that it might one day be given to all mankind? Certainly not—apart from the one passage to which reference has already been made²—as the conversion of all individuals throughout the world to Judaism. And that for two reasons. In the first place, it is as nations that Second Isaiah addresses the heathen, and the reception he looks for is from whole communities rather than from individuals. He has no notion of building up a " church " from individuals drawn from various national groups, but rather of the conversion of those groups themselves, under the influence either of the direct action of Yahweh in history or of the victories and policy of his vice-gerent Cyrus. That this account will need to be modified when we come to the Servant-passages is true enough, but what is said here is with reference to the public teaching of the prophet. In the second place, he does not seem to know of " Judaism " as a religion professed by a particular human group but only of ethical monotheism as the essence of all true religion. Nowhere is there the slightest

¹ xliv. 18-25. Begrich would place this in the first phase, but in view of the argument from prophecy (21) it would seem to me better to place it in the second.

² xliv. 1-5.

hint that the recognition of Yahweh by the nations will involve circumcision, the observance of the festivals, and the food-laws. He who worships one God and serves him in utter righteousness is accepted with him. Second Isaiah has thus anticipated the most generous spirits in Judaism and Christianity alike. He would have accepted the Rabbinic maxim that "the pious of all nations have a share in the world to come" as readily as he would have sided with Paul in his fight for Christian liberty against those who would force upon the Gentile the burden of the ceremonial law. As he looks into the future—and, be it remembered, by no means for him a distant future—he sees mankind as a society of peoples, each continuing the life to which it has been committed by tradition, but all united in the acknowledgment of Yahweh as the one true God and the service of righteousness as the doing of his will. In such a world, Israel will be what we should call the Messiah-people, and the rôle which tradition assigned to David will be fulfilled in the nation as a whole. The sovereignty to which David aspired and which his son frittered away is to be achieved again, but at the spiritual level, when Israel is given leadership among the nations as witness to, and servant of, the one God.¹

In the moment at which he came to that magnificent vision, Second Isaiah reached a solution of the problem which had so sorely troubled his predecessors. Two hundred years had gone by since Amos was the first to realise that the old naïve confidence in the identity of Israel's interests with Yahweh's purposes could no longer be maintained, and that the two could not now walk together, since they had ceased to agree. The partial insights given since then to this prophet and to that—Hosea's discernment of that in Yahweh's love for his people which would turn even disaster into blessing, Isaiah's hope of a remnant and his unconscious creation of it in the group of disciples which he gathered round himself, Jeremiah's rich personal experience and his

¹ *lv. 3-5.*

yearning for the new and better covenant, Ezekiel's passion for the divine honour and his grandiose conception of history as the demonstration of Yahweh's Godhead—all these fused in the message of Second Isaiah into a magnificent and fully satisfying whole. We who look back upon this process of spiritual development can see how such a result came about. Our prophet was able to solve the problem of his predecessors because he set it in a larger context than any with which they had worked. To the two terms, Israel and Yahweh, he added a third, the nations. The nations of the world ceased to be for him either mere victims of the divine displeasure with their sin or mere blind instruments in the hands of Yahweh for the chastisement of his people ; they became as fully human as Israel, with their age-long yearnings after truth and their need for just what Israel could give. The prophet has faith that they can and will respond if only Yahweh's Godhead is made manifest to them with sufficient clarity ; he has none of the modern theologian's doubt as to whether there really is after all any point of contact in human nature for the divine revelation. The astounding and unanswerable disclosure of the one true and living God is at hand, it has already begun in the march of Cyrus and the surrendered cities which mark his path ; but the prophet cannot wait for events to bring conviction, he must begin here and now to argue his case. The controversies with the diviners of Babylon and the doubters in Israel may well have been actual events, though we can hardly think that an open proclamation of Cyrus as the coming lord of the world can have been ventured upon without serious consequences for the prophet.

We may summarise the argument thus : *Second Isaiah is able to restore the broken unity of Yahweh and Israel because he has seen that the truth of the former, and the mission of the latter, are for all mankind. In proportion as it can accept this, the remnant as the survivors of the Exile will become the remnant as the believing community, through whose fidelity Yahweh can lead history to its*

climax, not in the destruction of his enemies, but in the deliverance of those who need him, yet have never known him.

But can we stop here? We cannot, for clearly much must have gone on in the prophet's own soul before he could reach—or should we not say, be led to?—such a conclusion. It must have been with him as it was with Jeremiah: the hope to which he attained for his people and the world can only have come about through some intimate dealing of God in the most secret places of his life. Nor are we left wholly in the dark as to what that dealing was. For scattered about his oracles there are poems of singular spiritual intensity and moving devotional quality, which reveal to us something of what came to pass in the silence when this man was alone with God. The secret which could never be disclosed in his public ministry, because to do so would have been to profane it, and yet which sustained him throughout it, is to be found in those passages in which the Servant of Yahweh appears. As suggested earlier in this chapter, these poems are to be read as a reflection of the prophet's self-consciousness, not in the sense that they describe what he was doing, but as depicting the rôle which he felt himself called to assume, portraying what would be true of him in such measure as he was able to respond to the divine intention in his life. In most of the poems, therefore, he speaks of the Servant as one with whom he seeks to identify himself and so preserves a certain distance between himself and this ideal figure.

I doubt whether it is possible to follow Begrich in his attempt to date these poems in the two main periods which he distinguishes in the prophet's career: in any case, this is not necessary for our present purpose. The total number of Servant-poems which has come down to us would appear to be seven, which should be read in the following order:

xliv. 8-13 (The prophet is to restore Israel)

1-6 (His mission is now seen to be wider than that,
to be for all mankind)

xlii. 1-4 (Yahweh speaks of his Servant, describing his world-mission)

5-7 or 9 (Yahweh speaks to his Servant on the same theme)

l. 4-9 or 11 (The prophet speaks of the opposition he has met with and his resolve to continue)

xlix. 7 (A first draft of the next poem)

lii. 13-liii. 12 (How the Servant's task is to be fulfilled one day)

The prophet began, as has already been said, with the conviction that when the expected theophany came, he would have a part to play in the return of the exiles: it is noticeable that those who return are drawn from many other regions than Babylon. "The dispersed of Israel" are evidently to be found at this time in many countries and the return will be a general one.¹ One might indeed speak of Second Isaiah in this connection as the first Zionist.

In the second poem, as was argued above, we are shown how he is led to see that even so great a mission is unworthy of the God who has chosen him. The decisive step is now taken, and he knows henceforth that his life and message have a significance beyond Israel for the heathen world. What this implies is made clearer to him in the third poem. The prophet sees that he who has called him to this task will surely equip him for it by endowing him with his Spirit. His work will be accomplished in quietness, without ostentation or advertisement, and with tender consideration for human frailties and doubts. Here something of a pastoral ministry among individuals seems to be in mind. Nor need we be surprised at that, for these poems supplement the public teaching of the prophet by giving us the inner aspect of what he proclaimed outwardly. We learn from them that the rôle assigned to Israel was not as purely passive as we had thought, and that the nations are not to be won merely by the amazement engendered

¹ On this see Causse: *Les Dispersés d'Israël* (1929).

by Yahweh's dramatic intervention or the victories of his agent Cyrus. The controversial passages which show the prophet arguing for his position make it clear that he resorted also to persuasion, and this poem implies that he definitely felt himself called to missionary activities ; he sought to make converts, not, to be sure, to Judaism so much as to ethical monotheism. And he has the assurance that his work will in the end be crowned with success.

In xlii. 5ff. he grounds his assurance in the might and certainty of Yahweh as Creator and Preserver of mankind : he who has committed himself so to his world will not fail his prophet, but will use him as the one through whom he brings the nations to himself. Volz¹ renders 6c as " I will make thee a law to humanity, a light to the peoples," and goes on to remark that the Servant " does not merely bring and preach the religion of Yahweh, the truth, he is himself *truth incarnate*, as he is incarnate light." Again, it should be insisted that this is no arrogant self-assertion on the part of the prophet, but the humble acceptance of what God intends with his life.

In the next poem (l. 4-9 or 11) the prophet speaks of himself. This passage is crucial in importance, because it so clearly reflects a personal experience and cannot be brought under the collective interpretation of the Servant-poems. It is of no importance that, if the poem ends at 9, there is in it no actual mention of the Servant as such ; I have therefore spoken only of the prophet in the summary above. We have here, in all probability, Second Isaiah's account of what befell him when he ventured on his missionary appeal to the heathen around him. He met with opposition and personal violence, and that, as it would seem, from his fellow-countrymen. They resented this attempt to share with their heathen neighbours and oppressors what had been given to them, and the prophet found himself threatened with judicial proceedings of some

¹ *Jesaja* II, in *loc.*

kind within his own community. But he seeks to reassure himself: what he has done was not of his own prompting but in humble obedience to Yahweh, and when the trial comes, Yahweh will undertake his defence.

He goes forward therefore, resolute and unafraid, ready to face whatever may be in store for him. Soon however he realises that he will not live to see the success of his mission; the hatred of his opponents is so bitter that they may compass his death before the nations have heard the liberating message. What then? Will Yahweh be left without resource? It is noticeable that Second Isaiah is not content with what had formed so large a part of his public teaching, the dramatic effect of Cyrus and his career of conquest. He knows that events do not of themselves carry conviction, an interpretation is needed: his own ministry of persuasion is therefore as indispensable to the winning of the nations as the march of this heathen Messiah.

The last and greatest of the Servant-poems seems to have arisen when the prophet faced this possibility that death might claim him with his work still unfinished. But the rôle of the Servant remains even though he passes, and only through such a figure can Yahweh bring his world-purpose to fulfilment. Therefore, with his own death in view, he incorporates this into his conception of the Servant and sees him as one who is to reach his goal, not in spite of, but in and through, death. The Servant has always been prophet, now he becomes also martyr. The figure to whom we are thus introduced is an ideal one, but not an unreal one, for his features are largely borrowed by the prophet from his own experience. The Servant is all that his creator has been and will be; all that he would fain, but cannot, be. He is unprepossessing in appearance and meets with shame and contumely from his fellows, because that has been Second Isaiah's own sad lot; by a travesty of justice he dies at the hands of his fellows, because that is what he expected would be his own fate before long. But death will not be the end

of the Martyr-Prophet, but only the beginning. For after he has gone from them, men will recognise that he was persecuted without cause, and, convinced of the nexus which binds sin and suffering in this world, will discern with awe that in this case it was *they* who sinned and *he* who suffered. Those who make this discovery belong, it would seem, not to Israel only but to the nations also, and they turn back in penitence towards him whom they had so unjustly slain. As they do so, God meets their changed mood ; his Servant rises from the dead and finds in a new life among men the following which had been denied him in the old one. So world-history moves to its climax as the conquerors rise from their thrones to acknowledge that he alone is mighty, he alone is great, who gave his life at God's bidding for those who were unworthy of such a gift.¹

The Ethiopian eunuch's question is ours too : "Of whom speaketh the prophet this ? of himself, or of some other ?" ² I surmise that had we been there to ask Second Isaiah whom he had in mind when he drew this outline-portrait of the Martyr-Prophet : did he conceive that *he* was meant to be this or was it someone still to come ? he would have answered : "I do not know. That is for God to decide. Should he call me to this shame and the glory which lies beyond it, I shall not be found unwilling. But I do not anticipate that it will be so. Rather does it seem that I must die, my work unfinished, and leave that work to another who will come one day, to suffer as I have suffered and by suffering to carry our common cause to triumph. All that is clear to me is that God will not rest till he has brought the nations to himself, and that he whom he elects to be his agent in this must endure rejection, count danger a privilege, and transform death into a weapon of victory."

¹ Note that the Servant is not "Messianic" : that rôle is for Cyrus (xliv. 1).

² Acts viii. 34.

EPILOGUE

WITH Second Isaiah this study closes. But the problem of conflicting loyalties with which it has been concerned did not cease with him. If we judge him, as we must, by the setting in which he lived, we can scarcely say otherwise than that his vision was the brightest ever seen by a man. How far it was embodied in the life of the little community which struggled to maintain itself after the return from exile is not easy to say. If the exclusive policy of Ezra made of the remnant rather a group retreating from the world's peril than one entering into its needs to save it, the astounding generosity of the book of Jonah is a more effectual protest against this than any criticism on the part of the modern historian. Nor must we forget that the prayers which are to be found in the later books of the Old Testament and in the liturgy of the Synagogue breathe a spirit of penitence and humility; they are the work of men who know that their nation is called not to privilege but to responsibility and service and that its task is to share with all men what it has received.

Under Persian rule the Jewish people could concentrate on their religious vocation—at least, the best among them could—while political affairs were the concern of an alien but not unfriendly authority. With the impact of Hellenism it seemed as though the nation must break up into two parties, one secularised and one fanatically orthodox. The sword of Judas Maccabæus united for a while the cause of the nation and that of God and even in the twilight of a generation which had problems but no prophet men could strike a blow at once for the fatherland and for the Law. But the very success of the Hasmonæans brought about a fresh cleavage between political ambition and

religious devotion, and the Pharisees challenged, while the Sadducees accepted, the identification of God's sovereignty with the extension of Israel's dominions and the prestige of its priest-kings. The transition to Roman rule brought with it the question : "Is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar, or no ?" with the various answers to this, ranging from the quietism of some of the apocalyptic writers to the Zealot furies which brought Jerusalem to ruin and its people to dispersion about the world.

Meanwhile, something new had grown up, a Church which gloried in the fact that it drew its membership from all nations, peoples, and tongues and which set at the centre of its devotion one in whom Second Isaiah's dream of the coming Martyr-Prophet had been fulfilled. Despised and rejected of men, Jesus had ascended a throne at God's right hand from which he ruled in the hearts of his followers and was destined one day to rule the universe. Henceforth our Western world acknowledged two authorities, the Cross of Christ and the sword of Caesar, and its whole history might be written around the theme of this struggle. Some of the most dramatic moments in that history—the conversion of Constantine, an Emperor barefoot in the snow at Canossa, the murder of Becket in Canterbury Cathedral—do but illustrate the various phases and possibilities of the struggle.

What of our own day? In some countries it is still possible, over large areas of life, to serve at the same time the nation and God. In others, the choice between them has been forced on many by the usurpation of the rights of conscience by some political tyranny. But nowhere is the earnest-minded person who acknowledges a loyalty to what is higher than the State without the haunting fear that he may one day find himself at a cross-roads of decision. With the solution of this problem it is not the purpose of this book to deal, but only to point out that it is an ancient problem and that some of the very noblest spirits are with

us as we wrestle with it. Perhaps it will help us to have spent some time with them and seen how they found the way to bring together their two loyalties or how, as in the case of Amos, they were content to preserve one and let the other go.

One reflection may be permitted in conclusion. It would seem as though human life was not meant to be lived under a single allegiance but rather amid the tension between two. If this was not yet the case, say, in Israel before Amos, it was because the individual and his conscience were still embedded in the community. But once the person becomes distinct from, and even on occasion opposed to, his social group, once, above all, he is aware that while he is of eternity it is of time, he must be prepared for conflict and the choice of the higher against the lower. To wish it were otherwise is to ask for the prize without the race, the victory without the battle. It is for us rather to accept the necessity for decision as that which gives zest and richness to life, and like the Hebrew prophets, to face the worst terrors of the world we live in as men whom God has called into his service and through whom he works towards ends greater than they at the time can apprehend. "Now God be thanked who has matched us with his hour."

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